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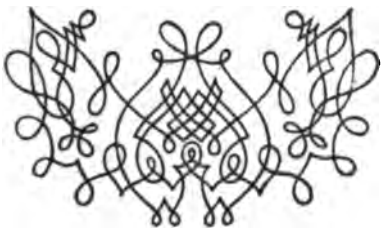




THE GREATNESS OF JOSIAH PORLICK

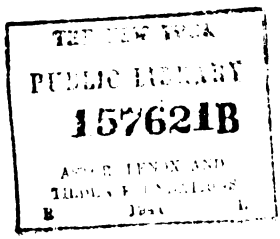


THE GREATNESS OF JOSIAH PORLICK



LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET
1904




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"Goddess," he cried, "thou knowest my stainless youth,
The days and nights spent in thy hallowed shrine,
Fame, power, and riches, say in very truth,
Shall these be mine?"
"Yea," she made answer, "these shall all be thine."

Broken and aged, before the appointed span,
Fame, power, and riches crowded round his gate:
His neighbours envied—"Lo! the happy man,
Rich, wise, and great."
He only moaned, "Alas! ye come too late;"

And railed against the Goddess whose decrees
Had cheated his ambition at the goal.
"Fool," answered she, "that wouldst for things like these
Barter thy soul,
And seeking half life's good, hast lost the whole."

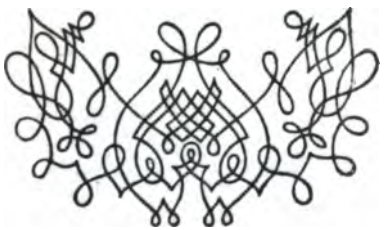


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THE GREATNESS OF JOSIAH PORLICK

THE GREATNESS OF JOSIAH PORLICK



LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET
1904

What you mean to do, do at once. That's how your father has got on."

As soon as Ellen returned with the diary, Mr. Porlick took it, and pulling out a handsome gold pencil-case, made the important entry in large characters, and turned down the page.

"There!" he exclaimed as he tossed the book across the table, "there'll be no excuse for forgetting, this time."

II

GOLDCROFT, Mr. Porlick's villa, stood on the slope of a hill not far from the Ealing Broadway. It was one of a common type—a speculative builder's attempt at Queen Anne architecture. It was red brick, of course, and there was a liberal display of cheap stained glass, white painted timber, and bent ironwork. Perhaps the best feature was a capital garden with large greenhouse, for the master was fond of flowers, and their cultivation was one of the very few extravagances he allowed himself. The furniture of the house was good but plain. The picture-frames were large and handsome, and the bedrooms were lavishly decorated with illuminated scripture texts. The glory of the dining-room was a splendid portrait of Mr. Porlick seated at his study table with a large account-book in front of him. The artist had been happily inspired, and had captured a most characteristic expression on the upturned face. There was a smile upon the lips, and a suggestion of triumphant energy in the quick-glancing eyes, which any of Mr. Porlick's subordinates would have recognized in a moment.

This was a presentation portrait, and the inscription underneath contained a brief but eulogistic acknowledgment by the directors of the

Mutual Confidence Insurance Society of the invaluable services rendered at a critical period in the company's history by Josiah Porlick, Esq., one of the Board. As a matter of fact, the inscription was well within the truth. When Mr. Porlick joined the concern, things were in a bad way. His financial ability, his enormous capacity for work, his remorseless economies, and some measure of the good fortune which seemed to attend all his business enterprises, soon made themselves felt, and before very long the Mutual Confidence was clear of the breakers, and sailing the high seas for the haven of success.

It was one of many similar achievements. Beginning as a junior clerk in a branch bank at Bournemouth, his father's death had left him with a small capital. As it happened, he had been boarding with an old family friend, who kept a hardware shop. The business had been declining for some time, until at last it hardly paid expenses. The proprietor placed the shop in the hands of an agent for disposal, and after some time received an offer. The price seemed ridiculously small, but the agent advised acceptance. Then young Josiah made his first venture. During the interval he had been quietly making inquiries, observing for himself the way in which the business was being carried on, and keeping an eye on other and more successful rivals. He now came forward and offered a rise of ten pounds on the previous bid. The offer was at once accepted, and the young investor found himself with half his patrimony gone, and a moribund business on his hands. Now, for the first time, he was in his element. He advertised for a manager, and selected a young man who was willing to accept

a small salary and a comparatively large commission. Then he spent half of his remaining capital in improving the shop and renewing the stock. Every moment of his time before and after office hours was given to the business. Not the smallest detail escaped his relentless scrutiny; not a single item in the petty cash went unchallenged. The result was very soon apparent. Week by week the takings increased, until the amount of commission payable under his agreement became quite a nightmare to him. Then came a sudden and unexpected blow. The directors of the bank discovered that one of their junior clerks was practically a shopkeeper. The manager called him in, and told him they considered the two positions incompatible; from one or the other he must withdraw. He did not take long to decide. He resigned his clerkship, and the same night gave his manager a month's notice. From that time he was his own manager.

As the business increased he was obliged to add to his staff, but as far as possible he employed "young ladies" whom he paid the lowest possible wage but treated with great politeness, and boys fresh from school. Out of such unpromising material his restless energy and minute supervision exacted astonishing results. As soon as a boy asked for a rise he was replaced by another. The new-comer had to be taught his duties from the very beginning, but Josiah rejoiced in any work that saved a shilling, and to pare down working expenses without injuring his trade afforded him a perfectly exquisite pleasure.

One step which he took towards the end of his first year was fraught with important consequences.

He opened an account with the bank from whose employment he had been dismissed, and made a point of showing the manager that he felt no grudge. This politic behaviour was soon to stand him in good stead. As the ironmongery business prospered, he began to look about for opportunities of extension, and soon fixed on Boscombe as a likely field for new enterprise. His own capital, however, was hardly equal to the establishment of a branch. He went to the bank, and his application for an advance was warmly backed by the manager and quickly acceded to. The new business was conducted on precisely the same lines as the old, with this exception, that here a manager was an absolute necessity. He was fortunate, or thought himself so, in finding a man who had been "in trouble," and was glad to get a job on almost any terms. The young master had no fear of being robbed; he was too careful and wideawake for that. Backwards and forwards between the two shops he ranged, appearing when least expected, and keeping his eye on every shelf, and cupboard, and cellar.

As he prospered, his ambition began to soar above hardware. Swanage was just beginning to attract attention as a holiday resort, and it occurred to him that house property there might turn out a very profitable investment. Once more, fortune favoured him. He was, as a rule, too cautious and too vigilant to suffer much from bad debts, but on one occasion he was fairly victimized. A widow who kept a boarding-house had come to him with excellent references, and had run up a heavy bill for gas-fittings and cutlery. When pressed for payment, she admitted that she was

already deeply in debt, and begged for time. A rigorous cross-examination showed that while the boarding-house was already heavily mortgaged, she owned two cottages at Swanage, close by the sea, and let at an absurdly small rent. Here was exactly the opportunity for one of those hard bargains in which his soul delighted. He had the less scruple in using his advantage to the utmost, because, as he told himself, she had deliberately tried to defraud him. The result was that he became the owner of the cottages for about half their market value. Even at the rent they were then bringing in, they were a capital investment. But, after careful inquiries and personal investigation, he resolved on taking a further step. He mortgaged his Boscombe branch, and with the money thus raised and the balance of his capital, he pulled down the cottages and built on the site a handsome house. The expenditure crippled him for a time, but the very next summer showed that he had made no mistake. The house was well let for the whole of the season, and before the winter an excellent tenant had taken it for a term of seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years.

He was now fairly started on the high-road to success. His great motto was—"never let an opportunity slip." A curious instance of the interpretation he put on this maxim occurred about this time or a little later. He was a very regular attendant at church, and was a pronounced evangelical. The vicar had noticed him as an energetic young man, and had enlisted his services as secretary of the Sunday School. In conversation at the tea-table, the clergyman happened to mention the fact that a former curate of his was in difficulties

with a school he had opened in Poole. It promised to be a success, but the curate had not sufficient capital to tide over the period of growth. Young Porlick made no remark at the time, but a few days after he called round and asked a number of searching questions about the curate and his circumstances, his wife, his family, and his connections. From some remarks he let fall, the vicar gathered that Josiah had been over at Poole investigating for himself, and this was the fact. Indeed, it was not till he had made a most searching investigation that he approached the schoolmaster through his former vicar, and offered—on terms—to finance the school. The terms were sufficiently exacting, and their effect was practically to make the ex-curate a servant of the real proprietor. As soon as the agreement was signed, Josiah applied himself with the keenest relish to the delightful task of mastering the details of school management, and cutting down expenses to a minimum. At the same time, he pushed and advertised with so much energy that the numbers rapidly increased. But he led his partner such a life, that before twelve months were over the unfortunate man was fain to sell out his interest, and leave Mr. Porlick in possession of the field. He now put the school in the hands of scholastic agents, and soon sold it for about twice the amount of his total outlay.

In this way, never neglecting a chance, and never for a moment relaxing his efforts, by the time he was thirty he was already a capitalist. But his eggs were in so many baskets that no one suspected how many they amounted to, when added together. This was just what he desired. The reputation of wealth would, he knew, involve, almost as a matter

of necessity its disbursement. He loved power and the sense of power which the consciousness of his financial position gave him, but for the mere show and appearance of wealth he had little care. He lived in plain though fairly comfortable rooms on the second floor over his Bournemouth shop, and let the first floor. His amusements were reading and casting up figures, in which accomplishment he was remarkably proficient. The books he read were chiefly biographies and travels, partly because he had a feeling that they were "solid" and improving, partly because every now and again he met with a character that really interested him, partly also because he could sometimes buy them second-hand in well-bound sets, for a trifling sum. Holidays he abhorred, and the only excursions he ever made were with some definite business end in view. On Sundays he attended church with absolute regularity, and was equally punctual in the performance of his Sunday-school duties. The remainder of the day he devoted to the Bible and Missionary Journals and Reports. There was something in the large and complicated organization of the Church Missionary Society that attracted and almost fascinated him. He had so mastered its details and statistics that he was regularly called upon to speak at the local meetings, and became treasurer to the branch. More remarkable still, he gave an annual subscription of twenty pounds, which, for a retail ironmonger, was looked upon as extremely handsome.

III

So far, young Porlick's career had been, in its way, a striking success; but, like most great men, he was never satisfied. Each upward step only enlarged the horizon of his ambition, and he began to dream in thousands instead of in hundreds. Above all, he redoubled—if that were possible—his vigilance not to let slip any opportunity, however small, so that besides what may be called the main currents, his capital flowed through a score of little channels, always or almost always returning to feed the parent stream.

A singularly self-sufficing man, it often occurred to him as a thing to be thankful for, that he had very few relatives to act as possible encumbrances on him. In fact, his only near relation was his sister Jane, who a few years before had married a working-man named Hastings, and had gone to live at Manchester. The marriage was not a brilliant one, and, even at that time, Josiah felt that it was unworthy of the position he was making in the world. He had offered to make a home for Jane, but she had preferred to keep herself, and being clever and energetic, she had managed to train as a school teacher, and had done fairly well. The brother and sister had not actually quarrelled, and still exchanged letters at long intervals, so that

Josiah knew he had a nephew and a niece, and—reading between the lines—he guessed that it was a hard struggle to make both ends meet. About her husband, Jane said very little in her letters, a fact which Josiah attributed to her being ashamed of him. He was greatly surprised, therefore, some seven or eight years after the marriage, to receive a letter from his sister, enclosing some drawings of a new kind of bolt, apparently simple in construction, yet highly ingenious. Tom, as Mrs. Hastings wrote of her husband, did not think very much of it himself. He had had several notions and one of them —a new soldering tool—had actually been adopted and had brought in a lot of money, but not to the inventor, who was too easy-going, and never looked after his own interests sufficiently. This time, his wife wrote, she had persuaded him to let her send the sketches to her brother, who, as a practical man, would probably be able to say whether there was anything in the idea.

The brother's first impulse was to toss the sketches aside, and write back that he had neither time nor inclination to do the work of the patent office; but luckily his favourite motto occurred to him, and the thought of a possible opportunity stayed his hand. Besides, there was the soldering tool, and a certain respect he had for Jane's judgment. He took up the drawings and studied them carefully. They were not the work of a skilled draughtsman—he could see that at once, but the more he considered the contrivance itself, the more he was struck by its ingenuity and simplicity. As it happened, he was going up to town the next day to consult his stockbroker, for he had already begun to invest in American railways. He made a copy

of the drawings—rough, but sufficient to show the working—and returned the original to his sister with a note, saying that new bolts were as common as mushrooms, but that he would think the matter over and write in a few days. The same evening he went to see the solicitor who had acted for him in most of his legal business, and obtained from him the name and address of a London firm who made patent work a speciality. Next day he went to town and left the drawings with Messrs. Whayne and Rushenden, to be submitted to an expert. The report came in a week's time, and was very favourable both as to intrinsic merit and novelty. The next step was to interview his brother-in-law. For that purpose he spent a week end in Manchester. He found the family living in three or four decently furnished rooms, but his quick, suspicious eye soon detected something amiss, and before long he decided in his own mind that Hastings drank. In order, he told himself, to be satisfied on the point, he had him to dinner at his hotel. Himself a most temperate man, he offered his guest wine, which was eagerly accepted. After dinner the bolt was discussed, and Josiah, after some guarded praise of the invention, pointed out the difficulty and expense of taking out a patent, till Hastings, excited and loose-tongued, declared that he had better ideas still, ideas that would one day make his fortune, and that as for the bolt, he would sell the notion for five pounds any day.

"Oh, come," said Josiah, "I think I can do better for you than that. I know a man who will give you twenty-five pounds down, and take all risks."

"Who is he?" asked Hastings.

"He doesn't want his name mentioned," answered

Josiah, speaking the truth and passing the bottle; "but he has authorized me to act for him. You had better think it over, and let me know on Monday—I never do business on the Sabbath."

He went so far, however, as to talk the matter over, the same evening, with his sister, and with her he went a little further.

"Look here, Jane," he said, "your husband—I'm afraid he isn't as careful of himself as he ought to be—doesn't seem to know his own mind. Now, I don't care one way or the other. It's quite possible I may get saddled with this thing myself, and have to bear the loss if it turns out no good. Still, I'm willing to do it, just as a matter of business, you understand. And as you're my sister, I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll give you another five pounds when the thing's settled—I dare say it'll come in useful at home—the rooms don't look very grand."

As he said this he saw Jane's eyes light up, and remembering that she too had a temper, he tried to carry off his last remark with a laugh, but it was rather a lame attempt, and he had to listen to some very plain speaking. He was determined, however, not to quarrel, so all he said in answer was, "Well, well, you needn't be so touchy. If you don't want the five pounds, I'm sure I don't wish to thrust it upon you. Tell your husband he'd better consult a solicitor—it won't cost him more than two or three pounds, and it will be much more satisfactory." Hastings, however, had a horror of lawyers, so Josiah promised to have a proper agreement drawn up and sent down for signature. On the completion of the transaction the cheque for twenty-five pounds was duly sent, nor was the sister insulted by any further offer of the five pounds.

The "Newdigate Bolt"—this was the name under which it was put on the market—after hanging fire for some months, eventually proved a brilliant success. Well made, well advertised, well pushed, it became a very valuable property. Whoever the mysterious "man" may have been who had authorized Mr. Porlick to offer twenty-five pounds, the latter's anticipation proved correct, and he became responsible for all the loss and, incidentally, the recipient of all the gain.

Two years afterwards, when it had become one of the best known articles in the trade, and the foreign patents were beginning to yield a considerable revenue, Mrs. Hastings wrote an indignant letter to her brother demanding on behalf of her husband some adequate share of the profits. It was the first communication that had passed between them since the completion of the transaction, and it evoked a short but characteristic reply.

"61, Torrington Place,

"My dr. Jane,

"I am sorry to see from yr. letter of the 28th ult. that, as is the case with most women, yr. ideas are thoroughly unbusinesslike. A bargain is a bargain. If the bolt had proved a failure I am quite sure you wld. never have offered to share the loss. I do not know why you assume that I ever was the owner of the patent, nor do I admit any right on yr. part to question me as to this. I do not mind, however, telling you that I did have an interest in it, and that its success was almost entirely due to the large sums of hard-earned money I risked in pushing it. But some months ago I transferred my interest to "The Newdigate Bolt Manufacturing Co. Ltd.,"

and if you or yr. husband think you have any legal claim in respect of the bolt, you had better write to the Sec. of the Co. at 88, Cannon St., E.C.

"Your aff. bro.,

"JOSIAH PORLICK."

It will be seen from this letter that Mr. Porlick had changed his address. The success of the bolt decided a question as to which he had been for a long time hesitating. He sold the goodwill of the Bournemouth and Boscombe businesses and came up to try his fortune in the great city which had been calling him for years.

IV

THE story of Mr. Porlick's early struggles, though necessary for the due appreciation of his ultimate triumphs, has taken us a long distance from Goldcroft, where we left the family at breakfast. At half-past eight to the minute he was accustomed to leave the house accompanied by his eldest son. At twenty minutes past, on this particular morning he left the table, and going upstairs to the room which was generally known as his study, came back with a sheet of blue foolscap closely covered with writing and figures.

"Look here, Amy," he said, laying the paper down on the table in front of his wife, "the party is on Thursday week. I have drawn up an estimate of what is wanted for twenty-six people. We have asked twenty-six, so if any can't come we can fill up with the children. The things I have ticked are to come from the Stores. Those with the double tick I will bring myself from town. The rest you can get in the neighbourhood, but mind you don't pay a penny more than I have put down. I have left a liberal margin. Come on, John; we shall miss the train if we don't look sharp."

Mr. Porlick's chief place of business now was in Baker Street. It was a large five-storied house with a wide frontage. The business was that of a whole-

sale ironmonger, and was very extensive. But it was common knowledge that the head of the establishment had other irons in the fire, though how many they were, and in what fireplaces, few could do more than guess. That he was a managing director of the Newdigate Bolt Manufacturing Co. was of course no secret. From the fact that almost all his holidays were spent at Bournemouth or the neighbourhood, it was generally surmised that he must have a good deal of property in that neighbourhood.

But the years that had passed since he first came to London, though they had seen and had helped to bring about many changes in the man, had hardly touched his restless energy and his loving mastery of detail. Whatever his other schemes and enterprises, he always seemed to have time for the matter in hand. Large as the Baker Street business was, he seemed to pervade every department. Every price list, every account book must pass under his eye. Not a manager, buyer, foreman, or clerk but knew that an unsleeping eye was ever on the watch, that any dereliction of duty, even the slightest, would infallibly be noticed and inevitably be punished. The love of power and command, which had been a feature in his character even as a young man, had developed into something like a passion. He had a conscience, and took pleasure in constantly assuring it that he was a just man, and that justice was the truest kindness. And it was justice, he told himself, that placed the best and hardest-working men on the summits, and it was only due to Providence that they should maintain themselves there in lofty isolation. Rebellion was to him far worse than the sin of witchcraft, and for it no penalty could be too severe.

This morning Mr. Porlick had to walk at a faster rate than was usual to him, and the consequence was that he deferred a little conversation which he had intended having with his son. In fact, when he reached the station he was almost out of breath.

The train happened to be a minute or two behind time, which always annoyed his punctual mind, and still more annoying was the discovery that he had left his *Times* behind.

"I really do think, John," he exclaimed, as he took off his hat to wipe his heated brow, "you might attend to such a trifle for me. You know how I dislike getting behind with the newspaper."

The *Times* always reached Goldcroft the day after issue, whereby a sum of two pounds ten was saved every year, but this made the accident only the more vexatious.

"Never mind," said John, "Beckton always has a *Morning Post* and Wade a *Chronicle;* I'll borrow one of them and bring up to you."

The suggestion seemed to please his father.

"That's right, my boy; if Beckton chooses to fling away his money like a fool, there's no reason why a wiser man shouldn't profit. Curious thing you should mention his name. I was just going to speak to you about him."

Here the train came up, and the thirds—Mr. Porlick always travelled third—being crowded, both father and son had to stand. This annoyed the younger man, but his father was consoled by the thought that if he had paid first-class fare, he might have had to stand just the same, and the Company have got something out of him for nothing.

Thrice during the day Mr. Porlick called down his

speaking-tube for "Mr. John," purposing to have a talk with him, but each time the order was countermanded, some other call intervening. Perhaps that was not the only or the real cause. Strange as it may seem after our sketch of Mr. Porlick's career, he was not infrequently troubled by a shyness that he could not master. Sometimes indeed an unusually overbearing manner was only an indication that he was endeavouring to mask his weakness. Nowhere was this shyness more troublesome than in the bosom of his family. There, at any rate, one might have thought, would such a man be free to speak his mind. There, it is true, he could and did hector and bully and browbeat when he had worked himself up to the necessary temperature, but when he was in a good humour and wished to speak with affectionate confidence to his wife or children, he at once became shy, and constrained, and awkward. Had he felt perfectly easy in speaking as he wished to, with his son, the interferences would have been put on one side with little difficulty. As it was, the difficulty, he knew perfectly well, had only been postponed. The conversation must take place, if not at Baker Street, then at Goldcroft. That very evening, he declared to himself, he would settle the matter. If the boy made any difficulty, he should hear some plain truths, and at the very thought of any opposition be began to feel his temper rising and his reserve disappearing.

During dinner he was unusually silent, and even failed to notice that the potatoes were not quite done. As soon as it was over, he said to John, "Come into my study in a quarter of an hour, will you?" and going into the room, took out a large balance-sheet, and went through it attentively.

It was twenty minutes before the son knocked at the door and his father was quite relieved at being able to open with the familiar note of rebuke.

"Late again, John," he cried, as his son opened the door, and went to the armchair on the other side of the fireplace. "I wonder how often I have spoken to you on the subject. Punctuality and method are the two wings for a business man to rise on. Yes, wings; that's just what they are," he repeated, struck by the appositeness of the phrase, and restored to good humour at once. "Now, sit down over there. I want to speak to you about business."

John sat down, and there was a pause.

Then, with an obvious effort, Mr. Porlick plunged into the heart of his subject.

"You have been at Baker Street three years next Thursday week. You started on your eighteenth birthday, with advantages your father never had. A good school and two years abroad. Think of it! In that drawer"—he pointed to the writing-table—"there's the file of your school bills and a statement of every penny your education cost me till you began to earn for yourself. A big sum—a very big sum. You'll be surprised some day when you see it. Now, since you have been here, I've treated you just as I should any other young fellow, and I'm paying you your market wage, no less and no more. But of course I don't forget that you are my son, and some day I mean you to take my place, if you behave yourself and show that you appreciate your advantages. If you don't, you must find a berth for yourself elsewhere."

Here Mr. Porlick paused, and then asked, rather lamely—

"Do you understand what I mean?"

"I think so," said John, who had heard it all, a score of times before.

"That's a weak, silly thing to say," exclaimed Mr. Porlick, irritably, for he began to feel the old difficulty in speaking freely.

With another effort, however, he forced himself to proceed.

"I'm going to give Beckton the sack—he's getting a great deal too big for his shoes. He's been to Rugby and Oxford and all that, and thinks the place couldn't get on without him. I'll show him. Why, he gets one hundred and fifty pounds a year, and isn't satisfied. I could get a girl any day to do his work for sixty. However, he's going, and I mean to put you in his place. It'll be a big rise for you—sixty pounds a year—and you'll be able to put away a lot."

"It'll be a rise of eighty pounds, won't it?" asked John. "I'm only getting seventy now."

"When I say sixty pounds I mean sixty pounds," thundered his father, now really angry, "Beckton began at a hundred and thirty, and so shall you, unless you prefer to stop where you are."

"I didn't mean anything; I only thought you had made a mistake," explained the son.

"Then the sooner you learn that I'm not in the habit of making mistakes, the better," "and, for goodness' sake, don't say such idiotic things as *I didn't mean anything*. If you don't mean anything, you had better hold your tongue. I'm afraid you are a fool, John; I really am, or else extremely careless."

John looked down sullenly, and Mr. Porlick, who had secretly hoped for a display of pleasure and

gratitude, was rapidly becoming incensed when, luckily, Mrs. Porlick put her head in at the door.

"I did knock twice, Josiah," she said nervously, "but you were talking so loud——"

"Talking loud! I should think so indeed," cried her husband; "but not half so loud as I shall, if that young fool doesn't mind what he's about. I declare I have half a mind to stop the party."

At this awful threat Mrs. Porlick's eyes distinctly brightened, and John looked in no wise distressed. Perhaps Mr. Porlick noted these signs, for he hurried on—

"But I suppose it's too late now. Well, what is it you want? I presume you didn't come to talk about the weather. You can go, sir," he added savagely, turning to his son; "and I would advise you to remember what I have said."

"It's about these estimates," said Mrs. Porlick, expediting her son's departure with a glance which he understood and acted upon. "I can't get Bulling down to your figures; he says it's much too fine."

"Does he?" asked Mr. Porlick, holding out his hand for the paper. "I suppose that means you want me to tackle him, eh?"

"Well, you know what a poor hand I am at arguing, and they see they can take advantage of me."

It was a very judicious speech.

"And not of me, eh? Well, perhaps I am a bit sharper at a bargain. No harm in that, eh? Means all the more for you and the children when I'm gone."

"Don't talk like that, Josiah; you don't feel anything amiss, do you?"

"Oh, I don't know. I expect I should, if I had

all the day on my hands. I've no time to think of myself. It's drive, drive, drive, from morning to night, and no thanks from a soul. It can't go on for ever. But what is this about Bulling? Let's hear what the rascal says."

And over the cheesemonger's delinquencies, Mr. Porlick recovered his good temper and spirits in time for prayers.

V

THE festivities to celebrate John's coming of age were on quite a grand scale. A flagstaff was set up on the lawn at the back of the house, and the Union Jack floated majestically from the summit. A marquee was erected for a select party of Mr. Porlick's employees. Once a year a "doomed black dozen" were invited to Ealing for a happy day, and their host had this year managed to make them understand that the birthday party was to be considered their annual treat. "The house party," as Mr. Porlick rather magniloquently called it, consisted of Mrs. Porlick's mother, a venerable old lady of eighty-three, suffering from four or five mortal diseases but bearing up against them with wonderful fortitude and vivacity; two married sisters and their husbands; the Rev. Septimus Shore, vicar of the parish, and his lady; the new curate, included to redress the balance of superfluous women; Dr. Burnyat, at the sight of whom Mr. Porlick involuntarily shuddered, for he detested doctors' bills; Mr. Matthews a local solicitor, and his son—supposed to be an intimate friend of John's; two of Ellen's school friends; and the Rev. James Cartwright, with his wife and son. Two of Mr. Porlick's co-directors with their wives completed

the delightful party, who were, most of them, strangers to one another.

Dinner was fixed for six o'clock in the marquee, and half-past seven in the house, the idea being that the host and his guests, who were invited for seven, would be able to go round and visit the dependents at their meal before taking their own. It was Mr. Porlick's intention to "say a few words" on each occasion. Public speaking was somewhat of an ordeal to him. He knew well that he was not an orator, and consoled himself with frequent comparisons between the men of words and the men of deeds. On the other hand, conscious of almost uniform success in what he undertook, he could not understand or accept his failure in what seemed so small and so easy a matter. With a dogged resolution which was almost pathetic, he renewed his attempts over and over again. He even bought a book on elocution, and would have taken lessons, but for his constant fear of being laughed at, a fear that, with his shyness, often underlay his outbursts of rudeness and bad temper. On this occasion, he was torn by conflicting emotions. His sense of importance could not brook the idea of such an opportunity being allowed to pass without a word from the head of the house, and he knew that he would afterwards reproach himself bitterly for his cowardice. On the other hand, he foresaw the agonies of nervousness which would beset him half an hour before the speeches were due, and he could already taste the bitter flavour of one more failure. When, however, Ellen asked rather flippantly whether there was to be any speechifying, he angrily committed himself.

"I don't know what you mean by that vulgar

expression. I shall certainly ask Mr. Shore to say a few words, and very likely I may add something. It would be strange indeed if we all sat like dumb dogs."

"Will John have to make a speech?" asked Ellen, quite unabashed by her father's reproof.

"Don't you believe it," mumbled the unhappy John, under his breath.

"Speak up, sir, or don't speak at all," cried Mr. Porlick, who felt as if he were being rubbed on the raw. "I hope, at any rate, you won't disgrace me and your mother by talking in that way to-morrow."

"To-morrow" turned out beautifully fine, and Mr. Porlick became quite genial as he remembered his refusal to have an awning put up from the gate to the hall-door. He insisted, however, that John should accompany him to town as usual, much to that worthy's disgust. The only concession business made to pleasure that day was to release the principals an hour and a half sooner than the accustomed time. Father and son reached home as the church clock was striking half-past five. Hastening to their rooms, they reappeared as the clock struck six.

Some of the friends appeared with almost ferocious punctuality, among them Mrs. Porlick's mother. Then, gradually, the rest of the company began to gather, until, by a quarter to seven, the party was complete.

For him, Mr. Porlick was quite gracious, and after welcoming his guests, he proposed that they should walk out and see the employees of the firm at their dinner. Accordingly the guests trooped into the garden, their host leading the way, with John close behind him.

The marquee dinner was catered for by a local Sunday-school contractor whose tender was the lowest of several that had been invited. It had been worked out on a basis of one and sixpence per head for not less than two dozen. Mr. Porlick had objected to this limitation, pointing out that though he intended to invite just that number, it often happened that one or two were unable to come. Finally, however, it was agreed that twenty-four should be paid for, subject to five per cent. discount for cash, one more or less to make no difference either way.

As it happened, there were no refusals; but, reckoning on at least one abstention, and fearful lest the contractor should get the better of him, Mr. Porlick, with more than his usual cordiality, invited the caretaker, who was not generally included in the annual visit to Goldcroft, and pressed him—there is no other word—to bring his wife.

"The more the merrier, Peskitt," he said heartily. "I shall expect to see the pair of you, remember."

Now, Peskitt had a little girl of seven, and it had been arranged that when the father and mother went to Goldcroft, the child should spend the afternoon with an aunt at St. Pancras, who promised to fetch her. Instead, she sent a messenger to say that there was whooping-cough in the house. Mrs. Peskitt declared she would stop with Flo. Her husband, however, decided differently. He was a comparative fresh-comer, and the master's genial invitation seemed equivalent to a command.

"We'll take the child," he declared; "'the more the merrier,' he said, and he'll understand when I tell him."

As soon as Mr. Porlick entered the marquee he saw that the full number—twenty-five—were there, and he rejoiced at the thought that he would get his full pennyworth for his penny. The next moment his face clouded, for he had caught sight of the child seated between her father and mother. They were near him, and Peskitt, rising, came forward with a confident smile.

"Good afternoon, sir; I've brought my missus, and we couldn't leave our little one, so we took the liberty of bringing her."

"Liberty indeed!" snapped Mr. Porlick. "What next, I wonder!" and passed on, leaving the wretched father, the smile upon his face gradually melting, like a dissolving view, into an expression of almost comic dismay as he shamefacedly sank back into his seat.

The meal had been delayed, and had only just been served. Mr. Porlick and his party marched solemnly to the head of the long table. There he stood, and taking up a knife, drummed loudly on the table with the handle. Immediately, the hum of conversation ceased, and a rather weak attempt at applause followed.

"My friends," said Mr. Porlick, and paused. There was a slight commotion at the far end of the table, and a woman was assisted from the tent, evidently on the point of fainting.

"Ah!" said Mr. Porlick to himself, "twenty-five, after all; exactly right; how providential," and began again, but with more courage than he usually felt or exhibited.

"My dear friends, I am very glad to see you here, enjoying yourselves, I trust, as usual on these occasions, though of course this is a special occasion,

a—a very auspicious occasion." (Cheers.) "I am glad, I say, to see you enjoying yourselves. My son here attains his majority to-day. I suppose he looks to-day something like I looked when I was his age, though he hasn't got his father's figure, quite." (Here some of the men began cheering, then stopped abruptly, uncertain as to the way in which their applause might be taken.) "There were no festivities for me when I came of age—nothing but hard work and small pay"—("same here," ran down one side of the table in a soft whisper)—"but I was never one to complain. Thank God, I always had good health—I never drank, and I never smoked, and I never threw away any money on theatres and music-halls. I worked hard and paid my way, and saved my pence, and here I am to-day with a nice little house and garden, and a bit laid up for a rainy day. Well, I hope my son will do the same, and be a credit to us all. He's twenty-one to-day. Depend upon it, in the long run, a man gets what he deserves to get, and he deserves what he gets; yes, we all deserve what we get, and we get what we deserve. When a man comes to me whining about his misfortunes, I say there are no such things as misfortunes—there are mistakes and misdeeds—and you've got to pay for both. If I make a mistake I expect to pay for it; but, thank God, I don't make many, or I shouldn't be standing here talking to you like this. Yes, and then, as I said, there are misdeeds. If I'd ever been guilty of them, I should expect to pay for *them*, and big pay too. Well now, there's one other thing I want to say. I hope my son will always be a religious man. I've always been one, I can truly say, and you see how I've been blessed. Now, I see you've begun, but it's never too

late to give thanks, so I'll ask my friend Mr. Shore to say grace."

The vicar repeated a short and simple form of prayer, and Mr. Porlick led the way out of the marquee.

As he passed the place where the unhappy Peskitt sat with his wife and child, he leaned over, and, with his most genial smile, said, pointing to Flo—

"That's right, Peskitt; see she has a good meal."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the astonished caretaker, quite unable to follow his master's lightning changes.

It was not till the party had returned to the house that Mr. Porlick remembered he had never invited his son, the hero of the day, to say a word. Too proud to admit that he had forgotten it, he only remarked—

"John, I've let you off one speech; you must do all the better with the other."

To a certain extent the shadow of the economist lay upon the house-dinner too; still, it was an imposing display, and reflected the greatest credit on Mrs. Porlick and Ellen, who had worked exceedingly hard. The waiting was, perhaps, the weakest point, for the gardener and his boy, who had been pressed into the service, proved absolutely incompetent, and brought at least half a dozen distinct thunder-clouds across Mr. Porlick's expressive countenance. At the worst, however, he was able to console himself with the reflection that he had saved something like a guinea by the arrangement, and, after all, it was only a question of trifling inconvenience. The victuals, he reflected, are the same, whoever hands them round.

There was no wine on the table. Mr. Porlick was a sincere teetotaller, but it would be idle to deny that, besides the pleasure of illustrating and vindicating his principles, he experienced an inner glow at the thought of the reward his virtue entailed. For one of his egg-baskets was a mineral-water concern, so that not only could he obtain his lemonade and soda-water at a considerable reduction, but a certain proportion of the remaining profit would ultimately come into his own pocket. For this reason he had insisted on the marquee party having lemonade and ginger-beer instead of tea and coffee, and, supplying them himself, had deducted threepence a head from the contractor's estimate.

"You'll have to do without intoxicants," he now said in a loud voice, which he meant to sound jovial, but which had in it a note of defiance, "there's not a drop of it in the house, and, please God, there never shall be; but there's plenty of good, wholesome lemonade, soda, seltzer, ginger-beer, and gingerade."

Mr. Sadding shuddered. He was the husband of Mrs. Porlick's youngest sister, and was always happy in the pursuit of half a dozen fads. At this time his attention was chiefly devoted to under-linen and diet. His two idols were Jaeger and Salisbury.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "do you really drink choke-damp? It's the most pernicious poison there is."

There was a pause. More than one visitor looked up curiously, to see how Mr. Porlick would take this direct challenge. Mrs. Porlick looked anxious, and Lizzie, from her sofa, looked at her mother.

"What did you say, sir?" demanded Mr. Porlick, to gain time, for he had heard perfectly well.

"I asked whether you drink the carbonic acid gas yourself, or only invite your friends to," repeated the audacious Sadding, quite undismayed by Mr. Porlick's emphasis and the impressive silence.

There was another slight pause. Then, with an effort, the host recovered himself.

"Here, James," he cried to the gardener, "bring me half a bottle of lemonade, and take the other half to Mr. Sadding."

"No, no," cried that worthy, "I like my cold water, still, thank you."

"And a very good drink too," exclaimed Mr. Porlick, expanding into sudden geniality, as it occurred to him that, after all, he would be a bottle of lemonade to the good. And for quite five minutes he rallied Mr. Sadding with great good humour.

When dinner was over, and everything ready for the ladies to depart, Mr. Porlick began tapping with his foot, playing with his fruit knife, fingering his massive watch chain (a presentation), and manifesting other signs of nervousness. He was, indeed, suffering acutely. He was conscious that his speech in the marquee had not been all that he had intended it to be. In the interval between the two functions he had retired to his study, and, sitting down at his writing-table, had pulled out pages of complicated accounts and performed prodigies of lightning calculation. This was his favourite method of combating his weakness by stimulating his self-esteem. Before he had gone through the accounts a complacent smile had shown that he was once more on excellent terms with himself. "Ha!" he had exclaimed, "I'd

like to see some of these glib talkers set to work on those figures."

Now, however, a chill mistrust was once more threatening to paralyze his utterance. He knew that delay would only make matters worse, and his will was imperious even over himself.

With something of a jerk he sprang to his feet.

"My dear friends," he began. It was the only introductory phrase he could think of, yet he did not like it, and his dissatisfaction disturbed the opening sentences he had carefully prepared. He began to flounder, and instinctively fell back on his marquee opening.

"I am very glad to see you all here, and I hope you are"—here he paused—"enjoying yourselves," he had been about to say; but, before he uttered the words, he felt that what was suitable in the marquee seemed incongruous here, "not sorry to see me," he substituted, with a gasp.

There were several cries of "Hear, hear!" and some clinking of glasses on the table. Under this stimulus Mr. Porlick's courage began to return, and, in a bolder voice, he continued—

"I need not remind you what this occasion is. Twenty-one years ago" (this was one of the prepared sentences, which, like bread upon the waters, suddenly floated into Mr. Porlick's memory) "there was a babe upon its mother's breast. Now, there he sits."

More applause, as Mr. Porlick, trying in vain to recall the next sentence, pointed with a dramatic gesture towards the unhappy John, who was feeling some degrees worse than his father. Indeed, so long did Mr. Porlick stand silent, pointing with his forefinger at his eldest son, that Mr. Sadding,

struck with a sudden inspiration, remarked to his neighbour quite audibly—

"Who is it he looks so like? Irving, or I'm a Dutchman!"

"My dear friends," continued the father, relapsing into the plainest prose, "he is twenty-one to-day, and we—I and his mother—have invited you here to-day to celebrate this joyful occasion. He has had a good education," continued the orator, after a long pause; "there has been no cheeseparing in that respect, and he has begun on the lowest rung of the ladder in his father's business—that is the way in which our modern captains of industry win their spurs—and to-day he moves a good many rungs higher up. Some day, when his father is gone, I hope he will be found at the top, and filling the position even better than his father did."

There was something very unconvincing in Mr. Porlick's voice as he finished this sentence. Perhaps he realized the absurdity of the pious wish, for he went on rather hastily—

"I am very glad to see my friend Mr. Shore. It is my desire that all important occasions should in this household be associated with the offices of religion. I am a religious man myself, and I am not ashamed of it, and, what's more, I never have been. Of course, it's easy enough now for a man in my position; but it wants some pluck for a young man to keep in the narrow way, and let it be seen that he means to. Thank God, I had the pluck to do it, and here I am. Well, I hope my son will follow in his father's footsteps. Now, I won't keep you any longer; but in your names, my friends, I say—John Porlick, your father, your mother, and all

these family friends wish you many happy returns of this day, and a long and prosperous life."

He sat down amidst loud applause, and John, who was looking the very picture of abject misery, stumbled to his feet; but his father, leaning forward with a heavy frown, said, in a very audible whisper—

"Hold your tongue; Shore's going to speak."

Glad of the respite, John dropped back into his chair; while Mr. Shore made a brief speech, kindly and tactful, which really did something to allay his agitation, and would have done more, but for the father's frowning face, which was meant to spur the son to eloquence.

When Mr. Shore had finished there was silence, for this time John was afraid of repeating his former mistake. But Mr. Porlick prompting him with an impatient aside—"For goodness' sake, get on your legs!" he rose, trying hard to remember a few sentences which he had diligently prepared. To his horror, he found the well-turned elegancies disappearing round the corners of his memory, while one thought, one sensation, suddenly overshadowed and dominated every other.

"My dear friends," he began, following his father's example.

Mr. Porlick frowned ominously, and Mrs. Porlick looked very anxious.

"It's frightfully hot," continued the orator, whose face bore out the statement.

He meant the remark to be an aside to his sister Ellen, who was sitting next him, but in his extreme nervousness it came out loud and emphatic.

For a moment there was dead silence. Then Mr. Sadding gave a dry chuckle, and immediately

a burst of laughter ran round the table, only Mr. Porlick remaining unaffected, glowering savagely at the miserable John.

"Sit down, sir, and don't make an ass of yourself!" he exclaimed.

But John was now in a state where it was as impossible for him to leave off as it had been difficult to begin. Without paying the least attention to his father, he fixed his eyes on Mr. Shore, who, luckily, faced him, and went on, speaking very fast, and sweeping up as he went along some of the *débris* of his carefully prepared phrases.

"Thank you all very much—I'm sure it's very kind of you all, I feel it quite impossible—I mean, I wish I could adequately—I mean, I'm very much obliged to you all for your kindness. As my father says, this is an auspicious, that is, I mean it ought to be—no, it *is* an auspicious occasion, and, as he says, we are very glad to see you all here. As my father has told you, I am his son, and I hope—I mean, I intend to show it in days to come. In days to come—Oh yes, in days to come, I may have a son of my own, and this auspicious occasion may come to *him*, and, if so, then I hope we may see you all—er—er—looking as young and beautiful and happy as you do now."

This daring flight was greeted with such wild enthusiasm that Mr. Porlick concluded it must have been rather good, and his countenance relaxed, though he did ejaculate, "I hope he'll be a better speaker than his father." The orator, encouraged by the cheers, began another sentence of thanks, but got into a hopeless tangle at once. Fortunately, however, the cheers and laughter drowned his voice, and, Ellen giving his coat-tail a sly tug, he



was wise enough to take the hint and subside in peace, if not exactly with honour.

"On the whole," said Mr. Porlick, when the door had closed on the last of the guests, "I am satisfied. I thought you were going to disgrace me, John, but you pulled yourself together. You must get rid of that absurd nervousness, though. You cut a most ridiculous figure when you got up. If you hadn't had me to keep you up to the mark, I don't know what would have happened."

"All's well that ends well," said Mrs. Porlick, with a little sigh of relief.

"Ah," returned her husband, "that's all very fine; but I want him to understand that he must learn to stand by himself. Suppose I hadn't been there!"

It was just as well for his serenity of mind that Mr. Porlick could not read the unspoken thoughts of his family as they dutifully kissed him and went upstairs to bed.

VI

MR. PORLICK'S room at Baker Street was on the second floor. It was a fair-sized apartment with a fine window-view of backyards and mews. The furniture was perhaps its most characteristic feature. Every article was of the cheapest quality—every article but one. In the right hand corner by the window stood a first-class safe, the key of which, attached to one end of his gold chain, was always in Mr. Porlick's pocket. Even this, however, had cost its present owner barely a tithe of its original price. It was another of his "bargains." "My buyers," he once said to his solicitor in a moment of expansiveness, "are everywhere. I don't know half their names. Extravagant fools! they buy what they can't afford, and then they come to me to help them. 'All very well,' I say, 'but what business have you with a fifty guinea safe and you with that chronometer? A man who don't know how to find necessaries has no business with luxuries. I happen to want one of those things"—whatever it may be—"and I can afford to have it. I'll pay you a fair price for it, and if you don't gladly accept the offer, it shows you have no moral sense, and I'll have nothing more to do with you.'"

The worst of it was that Mr. Porlick's idea of a fair buying price was generally peculiar to himself,

and led to bickering and grumbling, and sometimes to wicked slanders which troubled him very little.

Seated in his plain windsor chair, one morning a few days after the great party, he took up a sheet of paper on which his secretary had made a note of the day's agenda. He held the paper to his nose.

"Smoking already!" he exclaimed, "best Turkish too. *I* never smoke anything like that. Extravagant dog!"

He looked down the list, and suddenly giving a snort of anger and disgust, rang the bell on his table violently.

Almost immediately, the door opened, and a tall, slim young man with fair hair, and light eyes that looked out mildly from behind gold-rimmed *pince-nez*, entered the room. He was dressed quietly, and in excellent taste, and carried himself with an easy but confident air.

"Good morn——" he began.

"Look here, Beckton," interrupted Mr. Porlick, angrily, "these agenda are put together disgracefully. A boy of ten could do it better."

"What is wrong, Mr. Porlick?"

"Wrong?" cried the head of the firm, lashing himself into a passion, "why, *this* is wrong, and *that* is wrong, and the whole thing is an untidy, disgraceful bungle."

As he spoke, he tossed the paper across the table.

The other took it up, and smiled—distinctly smiled. Mr. Porlick was watching him, and there could be no mistake about it.

"It certainly looks rather the worse for wear now," he said, "but I don't think I left it like this."

"I see," cried Mr. Porlick, who, having reached

with unusual speed his goal of wrath, was now able to steady himself a little, "it is *my* doing, this disgraceful bungle. *I* am responsible for two different engagements, one of a business character, the other philanthropic, being fixed for five o'clock—the same time to a moment. Why, no errand-boy would commit such a blunder."

"Don't say that, Mr. Porlick," said the secretary, his eyes beginning to gleam with fun, "because I'm afraid the mistake is your own—a very natural one, if I may——"

"But you mayn't. I never heard of such impertinence. Look here, Beckton, I've had enough of this sort of thing. You're too big for your shoes, and that's the long and short of it."

"Still, Mr. Porlick, I'm sure you will be fair enough to look in your diary from which I made out the agenda."

Mr. Porlick snatched up the book with a vicious gesture, turned to the day before, and found to his greater wrath that the secretary was disgustingly correct. There were the two hasty scrawls.

"Wynds—Bolt Co., 5.0," and three or four lines below, sandwiched among other memoranda, "Miss Vance—Missry. Soc., 5.0."

He flung the book down.

"Somebody's been tampering with the diary!" he exclaimed thickly. "*I* never made that entry about Wynds."

But he spoke half-heartedly, and was immediately conscious that he had done so. Recovering himself instantly, he fell again to bluster.

"Besides, even if I *had* made the slip, in the press of business, what are you paid for, except to keep an eye on my engagements? How you earn

your wages, goodness knows—I don't. Any man who was worth calling half a secretary would have been in the room before I had taken my hat off, to call my attention to the clashing."

"You forget, sir, you gave me the strictest orders not to disturb you for a quarter of an hour."

This was true, and Mr. Porlick's irritation increased twofold.

"Yes, of course, of course; incompetence and idleness never want excuses. We all know that. As though you couldn't have made a note on a bit of paper. There, there, that'll do. I'm sick of this sort of thing. Do you suppose I'm going to let you waste my time arguing and wrangling and wriggling? The fact is, you had better find another job—something light and elegant, I should recommend, where you can sit with your feet on the mantelpiece and smoke Turkish cigarettes."

"Do you mean that you wish to put an end to my engagement?" said the secretary.

Mr. Porlick was quick to detect a note of anxiety in the words, and a gleam of satisfaction lit up his reply.

"I shouldn't put it in quite such fine language," he answered. "A week's notice is what I mean. There!"

"But, sir," exclaimed Beckton, who was genuinely astonished, "you can't mean to send me off for a slip like that, even if it was my fault."

"Can't I?" snapped his principal. "Perhaps you'll believe it if you see it in black and white."

And, tearing off the blank page from a letter, he scribbled on the back a formal notice.

"I hope you'll be very sorry for this one day,

Mr. Porlick," said the secretary, who seemed to have recovered his equanimity.

"Go out of the room, and come back in an hour exactly, for dictation, unless you want to lose your week's money," said Mr. Porlick, roughly. "Oh yes, write to Miss Vance—a card, mind—and tell her to come at five-thirty instead of five."



VII

Six months had passed. John was duly installed in Beckton's place, and succeeded better than either he himself or his father had anticipated. He was punctual—for Mr. Porlick never left Goldcroft without him—and he was quiet and methodical. Besides, he was cheap, and every penny given to him was, to a certain extent, saved—at any rate, it was spent in the family. At present, however, he gave no indication of possessing his father's energy and initiative. In some respects this was an advantage, because the sense of superiority was very agreeable to Mr. Porlick, who would have bitterly resented any signs of independence in his son. John, he told himself, would be the steady partner in the days to come, when the business should have passed from the strong hands of its founder. The vigour and dash would probably be supplied by young Hugh, who was already beginning to show a rather disquieting wealth of these qualities.

Mr. Porlick sat in his study at Goldcroft. Methodical in all his habits, he always went to bed at half-past ten. As prayers were at nine, he had an hour and a quarter on his hands every evening. Sometimes he read, sometimes he added up endless rows of figures for amusement, or dissected accounts, or took stock of his investments, or lay

back in his chair and planned new developments in his business. In one corner of the room stood an old-fashioned bureau. This was open, and from a drawer Mr. Porlick had taken several thick bundles of paper and a black leather account-book. With these open before him, he was busy arranging and re-arranging the papers, and performing in his head prodigies of calculation.

He was interrupted by a knock at the door. He glanced at the clock—it was five minutes past ten.

"Come in," he cried, in his loud harsh voice.

The door opened very quietly, and Mrs. Porlick came in.

"Josiah," she said, "I wish you'd come and see Lizzie. She's got one of her bad turns, and I do think we ought to get the doctor."

Mr. Porlick gave a violent snort, but began to fold up his papers and put them away.

"I sometimes think they come more frequently than they used to," she went on, "and nothing we can do gives her any real relief. Come and see."

Her husband made no verbal reply, but showed by his actions a silent protest against being hurried. He deliberately fastened his papers with indiarubber bands, and even stopped to endorse one of them on the back. Then he put them away in the safe with great care, and locked the door.

"Now then," he said, "let us see what all this fuss is about," and led the way upstairs.

It was not, as Mrs. Porlick well knew, mere contrariety or heartlessness that made him behave in this way. The truth is, every indication of Lizzie's delicacy, or reference to it, was painful to him. Years before, when the child was only eight or nine, she had met with an accident, slipping down

the front steps one winter's day. Her father was very much annoyed, because he had, only a few minutes before, refused the offer of a juvenile contractor to sweep them for fourpence. Lizzie was in great pain, and Mrs. Porlick wished to send for Dr. Burnyat; but her husband would not hear of it. It was nothing, he said, but a little strain, which a day in bed and a drop of arnica would set quite right. He had had many a worse fall himself, without going to a doctor. Besides, it was really the child's own fault. There was nothing the matter with the steps, only she was so careless; it would be a capital lesson for her, and would teach her not to be so harum-scarum. So Lizzie was sent to bed in disgrace, and was rubbed with arnica. The next day she spent on her back and seemed better, but the morning after, when she tried to get up, she collapsed, and was found in a faint on the floor. Unluckily, her father had not gone out, or his wife would have had the doctor in without more ado. As it was, Mr. Porlick declared that the child was shamming, or, at any rate, hysterical, and insisted on her being dressed and brought downstairs. As soon as his back was turned she was put to bed again; but he had been so angry at the mere suggestion of a doctor's visit that his wife did not venture to act on her own judgment. After about a week of this treatment Lizzie appeared to recover and was able to walk about again, whereupon Mr. Porlick magnified his wisdom at the expense of the faculty. It was in vain for Mrs. Porlick to assure him that the child was not herself, that the least exertion brought on fits of pain which became more, instead of less, acute. He only told her to hold her tongue, and not stuff the child's head with a lot

of silly fancies. The time came, however, when even he was obliged to admit that there was something seriously wrong with Lizzie. She lost her appetite, grew pale and thin and listless, and had occasional fits of pain which even he could not attribute to fancy or nerves. His remedy was the seaside, and as one of his tenants at Swanage kept a boarding-house, he was able to negotiate special terms, a circumstance which went far towards reconciling him to the expense. The sea air benefited Lizzie's general health, but the attacks of pain persisted, and culminated in a paroxysm so severe that her mother hesitated no longer, but called in a local doctor. He made a careful examination and gave so serious a report that Mr. Porlick's obstinacy was for the time overcome. An operation was the dread word which vanquished him. He was by no means devoid of natural affection, and the idea of death was to him intensely disagreeable. Then his ignorance of physiology and the distrust of doctors, which was fostered by his hatred of their little accounts, made the uncertainty of a serious operation seem almost intolerable to him. From the moment the word was mentioned, he completely altered his tactics. He went down to Swanage, was extremely rude to the local doctor, brought Lizzie up to town the next day and took her to one of the most eminent surgeons in Harley Street. To his intense disappointment, the verdict was the same. The great man soon elicited the fact of the accident and, quietly disregarding Mr. Porlick's blustering declaration that it had nothing whatever to do with the present trouble, explained that it had left a serious and deep-seated lesion, and that all indications pointed to a fatal issue unless an operation

were performed. Mrs. Porlick anticipated a terrible scene; but, to her astonishment, her husband collapsed, and agreed with the meekness of a lamb to Sir William's suggestions. But the fortnight before the operation lived long in the family memory as a period of acute suffering. The head of the household became so intensely irritable, so unbearably disagreeable that every meal was a source of apprehension. On the day itself he actually stayed away from business, shut himself in his room, refused his dinner, refused, with uncivil language, to see the eminent surgeon, and finally, when all was over, returned no answer to his wife's announcement that "It's done, and Lizzie is going on as well as can be expected." As the wheels of the doctor's carriage rolled away, he emerged from his study, looking ghastly, and immediately picked a furious quarrel with John for sitting in front of the fireplace, with his feet on the brass fender.

The operation was only partially successful. It saved the child's life, the doctor said, but it came too late to restore her to health. An invalid, needing the greatest care, she would be for the rest of her days. It was a verdict which the father refused to accept. "The butchers," as he habitually called Sir William and his assistant, had bungled badly in their ignorance; they really knew no more about it than he did himself, if so much. There had been no need for any operation at all, and he blamed himself greatly for his weakness in letting himself be over-persuaded. As it was, however, the child would soon pick up. Nature was too strong for even the stupidity of doctors.

Time, however, vindicated Sir William's forecast.

Six years had passed, and Lizzie, in spite of a bright face and merry eyes, was practically a cripple, and only a little taller and heavier than when she met with her accident. An invalid-chair for the garden, and a special couch in the dining-room, were set apart for her use. Her nervous system, the doctors said, had been shattered, and she would need the greatest care.

For some time after the operation her father had treated her with marked coldness. It really seemed as though he held to the theory that she had exaggerated if not invented the trouble. Gradually, however, his attitude had changed. Before the accident she had been the brightest and the most daring of all the children, and she still, in the intervals of comparative health, retained her spirit. Then people had already begun to remark on the likeness between her smile and her father's; lastly, she had evidently taken from him a wonderful quickness in dealing with figures. Long and complicated sums were her solace when in pain, and her sympathetic and intelligent admiration of his powers in this direction quite won his heart.

So, though he refused to hurry himself, as a matter of principle and because he scented a doctor's visit, it was in no unkindly voice that he addressed the child.

"Well, Lizzie, what's the matter?"

Propped up with a couple of pillows, a plaid shawl round her shoulders, her little face white and damp, she lay in bed as though utterly worn out after some violent exertion. But as her father and mother come into the room, she raised her head and smiled her indomitable smile.

"I've been behaving badly again," she said.

"How do you feel now, darling?" asked her mother, going towards the bed with a bottle of eau de Cologne.

"Now, do leave the child alone, and don't sluice her with that vile stuff," cried Mr. Porlick. "As it is, the room smells like a hairdresser's shop."

"I'm ever so much better now," answered the invalid, turning to her mother. Then, looking up at her father, she said, in her weak voice, but with dancing eyes—

"It doesn't smell amiss, father; it was a present from Aunt Ethel."

It was a joke that appealed to Mr. Porlick, even though it really told against him. "Clever little minx!" he muttered under his breath. Then, out loud—

"How do you feel now, child? Would you like to have the doctor fetched?"

This was a marvellous offer, and Mrs. Porlick's eyes opened wide in astonishment. But her husband knew what he was doing.

"No; he'd be no good now," said Liz, looking hard at him. "If he'd been here half an hour ago, he might have made himself useful. I can go to sleep now, and I shall be all right to-morrow morning. You've done me good already with that smile of yours, father."

For Mr. Porlick's face had indeed worn its most fascinating smile. He was genuinely pleased with the child.

"The fact is," he said to his wife, half an hour later, "all that child wants is a little common-sense management. She's as good as gold, and if her head isn't filled with a lot of doctor's twaddle, she'll

grow up right enough. I wish I'd never let those butchers try their experiments on her. Two hundred pounds in their pockets for half an hour's work—that's all they care for. It'll be no thanks to them when she gets about."

VIII

NEXT door to Goldcroft stood Ennerdale, a somewhat smaller house in a rather larger garden. The tenant was a retired congregational minister, the Rev. James Cartwright. He had at one time held a prominent position in the denomination, and had been a candidate for the chairmanship of the Union. Ill-health, however, had compelled him to retire while he was still in the early sixties. Mrs. Cartwright was a lady of means, and he had only one child, so that his declining years were spent in comfort.

The relations between the houses were decidedly neighbourly. When Mr. Porlick first came to London, Mr. Cartwright was preaching in a city chapel, and attracting large congregations. Though a strong Churchman, the owner of Goldcroft was not at all fanatical, and when he found that his neighbour was well-to-do and had a large circle of reputable friends, he showed himself perfectly willing to be on good terms.

This attitude of general friendliness was soon merged in a more definite relation. Mr. Cartwright's one child was a son nearly twenty-three years of age. Albert Cartwright was a solicitor, and having passed his examinations with considerable distinction, he was now working hard as junior partner

in an old-established firm. Mr. Porlick had often met him going to the city, and had been very greatly struck with his shrewdness and capacity. Several times, indeed, he had succeeded in getting out of the young man a legal opinion, *gratis*. The firm—Ellis, Coulson, Bates, and Cartwright—bore, he knew, an excellent reputation, and he was able, more than once, to put work in their way. Hence, in course of time, Albert came to be a frequent visitor at Goldcroft, and was recognized as standing on a different footing from ordinary acquaintances. As might be expected from so prudent a young man, he made his advances with the utmost deliberation and discretion, nevertheless it soon became apparent that he was powerfully influenced by the attractions of Mr. Porlick's elder daughter.

Ellen was at this time between nineteen and twenty. She was tall and strong, and of a comely figure. Her hair was dark, as also were her eyes, but her complexion was quite delicately fair, with—upon occasion—an exceedingly pretty colour. Her features, especially her nose and ears, were somewhat too large for the ordinary standard of feminine beauty, but they were well-shaped. Every one admitted that she was a "fine" girl, though many critical folk refused to pass her as really pretty. Her character, as far as it had shown itself, seemed to be a blend of father and mother. From the latter she inherited a kind, unselfish disposition. Even in childhood, however, she had shown that she had inherited more than a trace of her father's strong will and vigorous self-reliance. She was very intelligent, and had had a brilliant career at the High School. Indeed, she was distinctly the best girl of her year, and was expected to get high honours at

he Cambridge senior, if not a Girton scholarship. Mr. Porlick, however, intervened, and refused to pay the Cambridge fee, declaring that he disapproved of anything that encouraged the spirit of emulation, and the acquisition of useless learning among girls. As for the university, he pronounced it bad for men but unthinkable for women. He would sooner, he declared, see a daughter of his dead, with the comfort of knowing that her soul was in heaven, than behold her unsexing herself at Girton or Newnham. Now, Ellen had set her heart upon passing the Cambridge, and attributing her father's opposition solely to his unwillingness to pay the fee, she cast about for some way of procuring it herself. All the children had savings-bank accounts, but every quarter they had to go over them with their father, and explain and produce vouchers for every withdrawal. Her pocket-money was calculated—on a basis of the strictest economy—to keep her in gloves. Had it not been for her mother's surreptitious generosity, she would never have had a penny to call her own. In this extremity she went boldly to the head-mistress, with whom she was a great favourite, told her the plain facts of the case, and asked her whether she could suggest any means by which a girl of seventeen could earn thirty shillings. As it happened, Miss Royds had a brother, an Oxford don with the double reputation of being the best English scholar in Byzantine history, and of writing the most illegible hand in the university. He had just finished a short monograph on Belisarius, and had sent the manuscript to his sister, asking her to read it, and, if possible, get it copied for the press. This commission she now offered to Ellen, who joyfully accepted it. It was a harder piece of work

than she anticipated; but by dint of early rising and with Miss Royds' help, the task was accomplished in a fortnight, and the transcriber hurried home, proud in the possession of two guineas in cash—the first money she had ever earned. The same evening, after dinner, she went straight into her father's study, and slapping down three half-sovereigns on the table, exclaimed—

"There, father, that's my own earning; may I go in for the Cambridge now?"

Mr. Porlick lifted his keen eyes to hers, and looked at her with the searching glance that had made many an underling quail. Even Ellen, plucky as she was, and just then proud, too, felt a sudden qualm as she watched her father stretch out his hand and take up the money, his eyes fixed on hers all the time.

"Why, and how, and where did you get this money?" he asked, in his most deliberate and incisive tone. When money was in question, there was no nervousness or indecision in Mr. Porlick's speech.

"That's my little secret, father," she said, for it suddenly occurred to her that he might be angry with Miss Royds; "but I earned it fairly."

"Do you mean to say you refuse to answer my question?" he demanded, the colour deepening in his cheeks and the familiar frown biting into his forehead.

"I can't very well tell you, because it's not my secret alone; but it's nothing any one could—ought to object to," she answered.

He opened his hand and looked at the coins.

"Very well; then I must teach you a lesson. You think yourself a grown-up young woman, no

doubt, and able to defy your father. Not quite, miss. Not yet. I was thinking whether I couldn't let you have your way about this silly examination. Your brother John made a mess of it, and I dare say you would have done the same. But this settles the matter. You shall *not* go in—you understand. Don't let me ever hear another word about it. As for this money, as I do not know how you came by it, I shall keep it—that is to say, I shall make a safe and proper disposition of it for you. It shall go as a contribution to our branch of the Church Missionary Society from Miss Ellen Porlick. That will do—go!"

This last word was shouted with a sudden explosion of anger, for Ellen, with flashing eye and crimson face, had opened her lips to protest. As it was, she turned to the door and went out, just keeping back the angry tears till she had closed it—not too gently—behind her.

"He's a tyrant and a bully!" she said to herself, as she ran upstairs. "I don't care if he *is* my father. It's lucky I kept the twelve shillings!"

While the outraged parent stood in front of the fireplace, rubbing his hands, and smiling his pleasantest smile.

"Fine girl—lot of her father in her—wants a firm hand over her, but smart—smart as they make them. It's a pity she's only a girl."

The sequel to this incident would have astonished some of Mr. Porlick's acquaintances, who thought they knew him well. Among the many baskets that held one or more of his financial eggs was a cycle business that had been on the verge of bankruptcy. A month or so after the appropriation of the thirty shillings, a lady's bicycle appeared,

and was presented with much good advice to his daughter by Mr. Porlick. It was shop-soiled, and not the latest pattern, still it was a bicycle, and as he remarked, with a subtle reference to the examination episode, it would take a good many half sovereigns to buy such a machine in the open market.



IX

Mr. Porlick watched Albert's prudent advances with satisfaction. He knew well enough the temptations that beset young men, and the divine institution of marriage had his hearty approval. "A prudent marriage," he once said to his son John, "is the best investment a young fellow can make." Looked at from the point of view of the girl and her relatives, the case was even stronger. Marriage was the natural end and object of a woman's existence. All other occupations or so-called vocations were simply evasions of the providential order, to which he would never be a party. It was a girl's duty, as it should be her delight, to make herself agreeable in the eyes of any virtuous and healthy young man whose position and prospects were such as to satisfy the scruples of her father. In the present case he was satisfied. It was Ellen's plain duty to bring the matter to a definite conclusion. They were young, it is true; but the Chinese, a singularly wise people, though lacking our spiritual advantages, were in favour of early marriages, and—assuming, of course, adequate means—he agreed with the disciples of Confucius.

These sentiments, however, he expressed rather in general terms than with any pointed reference

to the particular case which was now in his mind. The truth is, he was beginning to feel a considerable respect for his daughter's strength of character, and he had no wish to stir up the elements of opposition by any premature show of dictation. At the same time, he had fully made up his own mind. When that was the case, he told himself, the affair was as good as settled; but, in this particular case, he would rather carry his point with a smile than with a frown.

One November evening, a cold foggy night, the Porlick family was assembled in the dining-room. Prayers were over, and the light and frugal supper, which Mr. Porlick declared was the only healthy preparation for sleep, was on the table, when the bell rang and Albert Cartwright was ushered in.

"Come in, Albert," said Mr. Porlick, heartily, greeting him with what Hugh called "*the* smile." "Why so late, my boy? Why so late?"

"I got home late from the office, sir," answered Albert, whose visits were usually so timed as to miss prayers. "We're always extra busy at the beginning of the sittings."

"Then I dare say you'll be ready for a rubber. Get the cards, one of you, will you? Have a glass of lemonade or a cup of tea?"

The young lawyer chose tea, a choice which delighted his host, for there were quite three cups left in the teapot, and took a chair near Ellen.

"Light or heavy?" he asked, with a smile, taking up a book which she had evidently been reading.

"Neither," she answered; "it's George Meredith."

"Oh," he answered, "I've often heard of him, but I've never read any of his books."

"No great loss, either," said Mr. Porlick. "I've tried to read one myself—a friend of mine lent it to me—'The Egoist,' I think it was called—never read such stuff in my life. I got through four or five chapters, and upon my word I didn't know in the very least what it was all about. I believe I should have gone mad, if I'd had to struggle through it. I didn't like the moral tone, either. I hope that's not the book there, Ellen."

"No, father; it's 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.'"

"Ordeal, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Porlick. "I hope he didn't try to read 'The Egoist'; and yet, do you know," he continued, turning to Albert, "it's an extraordinary thing—it was Mr. Shore recommended that book to me—it was, indeed. I suppose the truth of the matter is, a clergyman's mind must be like the stores—a little of everything to suit everybody."

"I never heard my father speak of Meredith," remarked Albert.

"Ah, but your father's retired, you must remember, so he can please himself. A very sensible man he is too; I have the greatest respect for him. Ah, here come the cards. Put the table over there by Lizzie. I'll play with her."

This was the usual arrangement. Mr. Porlick always played to win, and, being an excellent player himself, was intolerant of a partner who made mistakes. Now, Lizzie had a splendid memory and knew his play, and could second it better than any one else. As Ellen was only slightly inferior, and Albert not at all a bad player,

the result of this pairing was, from Mr. Porlick's standpoint, quite ideal. A good game with a slight inclination of the scales to his side, while Albert and Ellen were thrown together and made to taste the sweets of a common interest.

"We never play for money," said Mr. Porlick, as Albert began to deal; "it's a rule of the house. I would sooner give up whist altogether than play for halfpenny points. Otherwise we should have made a pretty penny between us, eh, Liz?"

"Couldn't we do it for charity?" asked the child, with a mischievous laugh.

"Certainly not," began Mr. Porlick.

"That reminds me," exclaimed Albert, stopping his deal. "There was a young fellow in the office where I was articled, he was a first-class player, and, when he could, he made an honest penny out of the game. Well, one Monday he came down to the office like a bear with a sore head. At last we found out what was wrong. He'd spent the week-end at a country house where they had Sunday whist. Everything went right for him, and he made five pounds. Just as he was thinking how nicely the money would come in, they told him the rule of the house was that all Sunday winnings should go to some Hospital Fund."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Porlick, boisterously. "Capital! Serve him right, turning the Lord's Day into an occasion for gambling! But, come, Albert, don't be all the evening over your deal. Where are the others?"

It was characteristic, that before he surrendered himself to absorption in the game, he must know exactly what the various members of his family were doing.

Mrs. Porlick was having a quiet doze with the outside sheet of the *Times* on her knee. John was entering up his "Diary," which he had already kept for a fabulous number of years. Herbert, a solemn youth of eighteen, was arranging some stamps in an album. Only Hugh was missing.

"Where is Hugh?" demanded his father.

"He said he was going round to see Tom Hart," answered Mrs. Porlick, suddenly waking up at the distant mutter of a storm.

"I won't have him going out after prayers without asking leave. Did you say he might go?"

"I don't think I did, but I wouldn't be sure," said the mother, divided between fear of her husband and apprehension for her son.

Mr. Porlick gave a snort of contempt.

"It's a good thing," he remarked roughly, "that there's some one in this house who can remember what he says and does, and somebody who can make himself obeyed. If I don't see Hugh when he comes in, tell him not to go to bed till I've had a word with him. Now, then, let's begin, for goodness' sake. What's trumps?"

Late that evening, after the others had gone to bed, Mr. Porlick sat talking with Albert. It was a most unusual, almost a portentous occurrence, for the master of the house, being an early riser, was also an early bed-seeker. On this particular evening, however, he seemed in no hurry. Neither did his guest.

Yet the conversation was not very brilliant. For some time it was confined to business matters, and was chiefly engrossed by some reminiscences of Mr. Porlick's triumphs in the past. Then it

gradually drifted, or perhaps was guided to Albert's prospects. As to these, the young man was very frank.

"I reckon my income from the business at four hundred pounds, and it looks like increasing steadily. Then I have between three hundred and four hundred pounds a year from my mother's estate."

"Well, now!" exclaimed Mr. Porlick, "that's the first time I ever heard that the present Mrs. Cartwright isn't your mother. Dear me! Though it's quite true, now one comes to think of it, that you don't favour her or your father in appearance."

"No," said Albert, with a smile, "she was dark and slim. I'll show you her portrait some day. She came from the North—a well-known family—one of the Liverpool Hardings."

"Not the bankers?" asked Mr. Porlick, eagerly.

"Yes. Part of my mother's estate consists of shares in Harding's Bank. Funny you should know them."

"Funny? Why, every business man knows them by name. Well, you're a lucky young fellow—it's good to have money in the family."

"I suppose it is," answered the young man, with an affectation of indifference that was, perhaps, just a little overdone.

"My boy," said Mr. Porlick, with great earnestness, "don't speak of your advantages in that tone. Of course, money isn't everything. Character and good principles are more any day. I'd little enough money when I started. But it's one of the best things a man can have. There's nothing to steady a man like the weight of the moneybags. It gives him influence, power—yes, power. Why, you know

how it is in church or chapel. Who's paid most heed to, on a committee, the man with a hundred a year or the man with ten thousand? Quite right too. I often say, in the long run a man gets what he deserves to get. Show me a man who's made a million, and I'll show you one with a clear head and a strong will."

There was a pause. Mr. Porlick's enthusiasm had led him off the track for the moment, but he soon recalled himself.

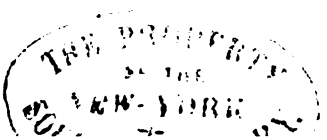
"Well, remember, Albert, if my experience can ever be of any service to you, I shall always be ready to advise you. I don't make friends very quickly, but when I do, it means something."

"There's one thing I should like to ask you, Mr. Porlick, that I shouldn't have ventured on if you hadn't been so kind to me."

"Out with it, my boy," cried the senior, heartily. "What is it?"

"Well, it's this," said Albert, speaking slowly and with an obvious effort. "Since I've been visiting here, I've—I've—well, I've become very much attached to Miss Porlick. Do you think I should have any chance, and if so, would you make any objection?"

"Well," exclaimed Mr. Porlick, after another pause, "this comes rather suddenly; but, since you ask me plainly and frankly, I will answer you in the same spirit. If you can get her to say 'Yes,' I shall raise no objection whatever. Of course you would have to start housekeeping in a very modest way, because my money is tied up for the present, and what I may have to leave will come to her at my death; but I married on less than you would have. As to what answer she will give you, you



must find that out for yourself; but this I will tell you, that my influence will be exerted in your favour."

"Thank you, sir; you have always been exceedingly kind to me."

"I mean to be, at any rate. I wouldn't be in too great a hurry with Ellen. Girls are mettlesome creatures, and ready to jib at their own shadows. Take your time; but don't go to sleep yourself, and don't let her."



BOOK II





I

Up to this point Mr. Porlick's career had been practically an unbroken series of triumphs. What his hand had found to do, he had done with his might, and the rewards which had come to him had been precisely those which he could best appreciate and enjoy. Moreover, as the years had passed, he had attained to a serenity of spirit that afforded him other and, as he often told himself, higher gratifications than the mere accumulation of wealth, or even than the acquisition of power and influence. There had been times in his early manhood when qualms of conscience had worried him. Such an incident, for instance, as the purchase of the Newdigate bolt had caused him many an uneasy hour in spite of the vigorous common sense which, even in his early days, he brought to bear upon the ethics of business. But as time went on, and experience ripened, such incidents ceased to vex him with after-questionings and scruples. For one thing his favourite doctrine of the man and his deserts, proved of inestimable value. Here was Providence, year after year, signifying its approval of his character and conduct by the most unmistakable signs. What could be more encouraging than to see the Biblical blessings of fruitful flocks and bursting barns adapted to his bank balances and company

shares? Meanwhile his moral code, in matters of detail, became more and more draconic. The very thought of debt became hateful to him: he insisted on paying cash down, and fretted at the tradesmen's weekly books. He rejoiced in the thought that he bound himself by at least as strict a rule as he exacted from his neighbours. And when he compared his own code and his own practice with theirs, he felt it was really little wonder he had so experienced such striking success where so many met with ignominious failure. Each new step in advance brought to his soul a fresh and comfortable assurance of divine approval, till at last his conscience had only one function—to register and to censure the failings of his neighbours.

One morning, among a sheaf of letters brought up to his study before breakfast, there was a black-bordered envelope bearing on its back a familiar handwriting, that he immediately singled out. The large square characters, not quite so square and firm, however, as of old, were his sister Jane's, he was sure of that. And that black border. Why did his mind instantly revert to the Newdigate bolt?

Opening it, a plain card, "In loving memory of Thomas Hastings," fell out. It was enclosed in a letter which he unfolded and read.

"DEAR JOSIAH,

"You will see by the card that last month poor Tom died. He had been ill some time, and we were hard put-to to bury him decently. And now the doctor tells me I am suffering from what he calls an internal 'growth.' We know what that means. I have been in great pain for a long time

now, and, as far as I am concerned, death would be a relief. But I have the children to think of, and it is because of them I am writing to you. There are two of them—we lost three. Len, the younger, is nineteen. He is a clerk, but he has been unlucky and is out of work just now. Julia is a year older, and has been living at home. They have both had a good education for their position, and with a little influence would soon be able to fend for themselves. I know you are hard by nature, and selfish on principle, but I believe you have a conscience, and though I am sure you will think poor relations a great nuisance, I think you will recognize the claims of kinship and at any rate keep an eye on your nephew and niece.

"I write this to-night, because to-morrow I go into the hospital for an operation. If it turns out well, I hope I may be able to look after the children myself. If not, I solemnly commit them to your charge.

"Your Sister,

"JANE HASTINGS."

This letter seriously discomposed Mr. Porlick. It raised once more the old question of the Newdigate bolt. He knew perfectly well that its acquisition really marked the change in his fortunes from the prosperous tradesman to the wealthy merchant, yet he would sooner have had any other corner-stone for his fortune. He had argued the matter with his conscience a thousand times, and had invariably felt that the best of the argument was with him, yet behind and beyond all reasoning there was some ghostly feeling that no logic could entirely lay. Now this inopportune death would,

he felt sure, revive in his mind or heart the whole miserable affair for many a long day. Then death seemed to introduce a new factor. He felt as though the slipshod, careless inventor suddenly occupied a new post of vantage, as though he might now have unseen principalities and powers for his allies. Lastly came that gruesome word "operation" which had already made him wince. Almost instinctively he looked ahead and saw another black-edged card. Nor were all the springs of natural affection quite dried up in his breast. He began to recall the days of old, and long-forgotten incidents that one might have supposed buried for ever, rose from the dead and began to walk about the streets of memory. Try as he would, he could not lay them. Brother and sister—she some three years the elder—they had fought their childish battles side by side, and many a time she had borne the brunt. They had both of them been strong and undemonstrative, yet even so, he could remember occasions in those early days when the tie that bound them had proved itself more than a legal definition. Jenny and Joe, it used to be then; how ridiculous it sounded now! Poor soul—perhaps the butchers might be at work upon her now. Why, that sort of thing ran in the blood sometimes—it might even come to him.

This horrible idea roused him from his reverie. By a resolute effort he turned from the past to the present, took up his other letters, and was soon absorbed in them, so that when he came down to prayers he was able to scold Emily for her wicked extravagance in firewood, as if no untoward news had reached him.

II

It was on the first Tuesday in February, a bitter, blustering, leaden morning, that Mr. Porlick received his sister's letter. During breakfast he was—even for him—unusually taciturn, and on his way down to business, he hardly exchanged a syllable with John. Only as they entered the door at Baker Street, he turned angrily upon him.

"A pretty companion you are," he said; "not a single word all the way down. Any one would think you had something on your conscience."

John mumbled something of which his father took no heed, and went into his little room. He was still acting as his father's secretary, and spent a considerable part of his time in taking down in shorthand, and afterwards typing the correspondence.

At ten o'clock, as a rule, Mr. Porlick rang the bell which communicated with his son's room. To-day, however, ten passed, half-past, and a quarter to eleven. Two or three times John consulted his watch, for, as far as he knew, there was no engagement to detain his father. At last he went out very quietly to see if he could borrow a paper from one of the foremen. He had to pass his father's door, and as he did so a board creaked. Instantly Mr. Porlick's voice rang out, loud and challenging.

"Who's that? Come in here!"

Endeavouring to assume an air of indifference, John opened the door. His father was standing in one of his characteristic attitudes, on the hearthrug, with his back to the fire, his legs slightly opened, chest thrust out, head well back. His left hand was deep in his trousers pocket; in his right he held an open letter.

"What are you creeping about like that for?" he snapped.

"I wasn't creeping," answered John, in the sullen tone he almost always used when conversing with his father.

"Yes, you were," thundered the head of the firm; "do you think I don't know a firm, honest, manly step, from that coward's tip-tap? Sit down. I want to talk to you."

With the instinct of fear, John read the ominous signs of a storm, and hastily ran over the possibilities, but in vain. He took the chair his father indicated.

"You're a very poor secretary, John," began Mr. Porlick. "I thought Beckton was bad, but you're worse. I thought him dear at a hundred and fifty pounds, and so he was, but you're dearer at a hundred and thirty, and when you'd earn a rise, goodness knows. If you think I'm going to pay you good money for bad work, you make a great mistake. But, of course, you are my son, and I'm bound to do what I can for you. Now, I'm going to give you another chance. It's one of a thousand, too. The only disadvantage will be that you won't be under my eye as you are here."

Looking keenly at his son, Mr. Porlick here

fancied he saw a glimmer of satisfaction light up the dull and heavy eyes turned towards him, so he hastened to add—

"But there won't be much difference, really. I shall hear about you constantly, and, as you will be under the strictest supervision, I shall know at once if you are careless or remiss."

"What is the work?" asked John; for Mr. Porlick had paused, looking down at the letter.

"This is a letter," he said at length, looking up, and throwing the letter on the table, "from Gamble, in Berlin. He's in Rothenheimer's, with whom we've been doing a lot of business lately. I've done them more than one good turn, and they, very properly, seem anxious to oblige me. They want an English clerk, a young man in good position. It will be a splendid opportunity for you to perfect yourself in German, and to see their business methods. If you have your wits about you, you might find ways of introducing business, outside Rothenheimer's. I shall treat you just as I should an outsider, and any business you bring us, you shall be paid for. They will give you a hundred and fifty pounds a year, which is fifty at least more than they would give to any one who didn't come from me. Gamble says you can have rooms at a very moderate rent in the house where he lodges, and he will keep an eye on you. It's a grand opportunity if you choose to turn it to good account. If you don't, it's about your last chance of ever coming to rule here. I'll never give up the reins to a man who can't drive. If you won't learn to do it properly, some one else shall sit on the box."

"When do they want me to go?" asked John.

"As soon as possible. You had better write at once to Gamble, and say you will leave for Berlin next week, so that you can start work on Monday week. Now bring your book. I want to dictate."



III

BESIDES the letters which Mr. Porlick dictated to his son that first Tuesday in February, there was another which he wrote with his own hand, and which ran as follows:—

"MY DR. JANE,

"I duly recd. yr. letter, and am very sorry to hear such bad news. I was afraid yr. husband wouldn't make a long life. I remember telling you he didn't take enough care of himself. I am also very sorry to hear that he has left you without any provision, especially as you are in such poor health. I would strongly advise you not to put yrself in the hands of the doctors. Their one idea is to cut, cut, cut. I have suffered, myself, at their hands, for my youngest child is—thanks to them—still on her back. However, I don't suppose anything I can say will affect yr. determination; but you will remember that I warned you.

"With regard to yr. children. There is really no vacancy here in my business, unless I make one, which is never easy; but in this case I am willing to do so. I will, to a certain extent, re-arrange the office work, and will put in yr. boy as a junr. clerk at seventy-five pounds a year. His progress will depend entirely on himself. I hope

he is qualified in shorthand and typewriting. If not, he must make himself proficient at once in his evenings, and I will advance him the money for the fees. Let me know how you get on.

"Yr. aff. bro.,

"JOSIAH PORLICK."

On the Friday following he received a letter with the Liverpool post-mark in a writing curiously like his sister's, yet, he felt sure, not hers. It was from his niece, and was very short.

"DEAR UNCLE,

"Mother has asked me to write and tell you that the operation was performed" (Mr. Porlick shuddered) "the day before yesterday and was successful. She is wonderfully well, considering. She thanks you for your offer to take Len. He will call at your office on Monday morning unless he hears from you to the contrary. He is a fair typist, but has only just begun shorthand.

"Yours sincerely,

"JULIA HASTINGS."

"Not a bad letter that," said Mr. Porlick, as he folded it and put it in a drawer. "The girl's no fool—takes after her mother, I can see. Poor Jane! But why didn't the boy write for himself? I don't like the look of that. His father's son, I'm afraid."

Late on Saturday afternoon a telegram came to Goldcroft—

"Mother worse. Len can't come Monday."

This upset Mr. Porlick greatly. As yet he had

said nothing at home about his sister's illness or her husband's death, nor had he mentioned to John that a cousin was to take his place. Now, as he sat in his study looking blankly into the gas fire which he had just lit, he felt a strong desire for some one with whom to share his trouble. In the drawing-room Ellen was trying over some songs with Albert for a penny reading which was imminent. The merry jingle grated on his nerves. He pulled the bell—a violent peal—which brought the housemaid in a panic.

"Tell your mistress I want her," he snapped.

"In one of his tantrums!" said Emily to herself, as she left the room. "I wouldn't change places with missus for something."

"Stop that wretched noise downstairs, will you?" cried Mr. Porlick, when his wife appeared, nervous and anxious. "It's too bad if a man can't have half an hour's quiet in his own house. It's worse than a German band."

"It's Ellen, trying over her songs with Albert for next Thursday."

"I don't care what it is or who it is; I'm not going to have it. If you can't or won't stop it, I must go and see to it myself."

"No, Josiah," exclaimed Mrs. Porlick, hurriedly; "I will go and explain to them."

"Be quick about it, then," said her husband, a little more graciously. "I want to speak to you."

In a minute or two the music stopped abruptly, and shortly afterwards Mrs. Porlick appeared again panting, and sank into a chair.

Immediately, Mr. Porlick began, speaking in a hard, forced tone.

"My sister Jane is dying from cancer, and her husband is dead."

"Oh, Josiah, how dreadful!" exclaimed his wife, in a voice which threatened tears.

"There, there," cried Mr. Porlick, irritably, "I don't want any hysterics. She isn't *your* sister, and you haven't ever set eyes on her. If *you* feel upset, what do you suppose it must be for me?"

"Why, of course it must be terrible for you. Where is she? Are you going to see her?"

"She's at Manchester," answered Mr. Porlick, "and I expect I shall hear again on Monday. Till then there's nothing to be done. I've promised to take on the eldest boy at Baker Street."

"How many children are there?"

"Two; this boy and a girl."

"Poor things! Will they be well provided for?"

"No; as poor as rats. I expect I shall have to keep them."

"Do you mean the boy to live here? We could easily put him in the room above Hugh."

"Live here!" exclaimed Mr. Porlick, angrily. "What could put such an absurd idea into your head? I shall give him enough to get a decent lodging for himself; better than I had at his age, I'll warrant."

"What will the girl do?"

"Do? Why, I expect I shall have to find her some sort of a job. It's a bad business altogether."

"Josiah," began Mrs. Porlick, after a pause, "you know we shall want some one to take Miss Groves' place."

"Why, do you mean to say she still persists in that mad idea of hers?" cried Mr. Porlick, waking

up into wrath; "after that talk I had with her, too?"

"I'm afraid she does. And Lizzie doesn't really want a teacher so much as some one to be with her and amuse her. She reads a great deal, but if she tries to do regular lessons she gets those headaches."

Mr. Porlick was making some rapid calculations, as his wife could easily see by the abstracted look which had suddenly replaced his angry expression.

"When does that silly woman want to go?" he asked.

"This day week her month is up."

"Well, I'll think things over. Send her up to me. I'll have a word with her."

"I think—don't you think——" began Mrs. Porlick, uncomfortably, as she stood up to go.

"Now, Amy, what is it? I always know you're going to say something sillier than usual when you begin like that. Out with it."

"I only meant—oughtn't we—I mean, wouldn't it be nice to give her a little present if she's going to be married? It needn't be much," added Mrs. Porlick, quickly, for she saw the frown gathering on her lord's brow, "just a trifle, I thought. She has been with us a long time now, and she has been very good with Lizzie."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Porlick, fairly exploding under this intolerable provocation, "hasn't she been paid for her goodness? Does she ever think of me or study my convenience? I told her I wished her to remain. I even offered to raise her salary, if that was what she was driving at. I explained to her the utter folly of marrying on next

to nothing. Not a bit of good. She wouldn't even tell me whom she is going to marry—if they do marry. And now my own wife actually asks me to give her a wedding present. A box on the ears or a good shaking is what she wants. The only present she'll get from me is a piece of good advice that'll make her ears tingle just as well. Send her up, will you?—and don't keep the door open. You know that's how I get cold; but there, of course that's nothing when Miss Groves is in question. Wedding present, indeed!"

A few minutes later Miss Groves knocked at the door. Her first knock was a timid one; but Mr. Porlick made no sign, though he heard it distinctly. The second was louder, and he called out, "Come in!" in his roughest tone.

"Oh, it's you!" was his greeting.

"I heard you wished to speak to me," said the little governess, coming into the room and standing by the table.

"So I do, Miss Groves. I want to understand about this nonsense. You heard what I said to you the other day. You've no complaint to make, have you, about the way you've been treated here?"

"Oh no, Mr. Porlick, it isn't that——"

"That's something to be grateful for, at any rate," interrupted her employer, with laborious sarcasm. "Then you're leaving simply to get married. You've no means yourself, or you wouldn't have been governessing all these years. You told me the man you say you're going to marry isn't well off. Therefore you've no business to marry at all, and you ought to be ashamed to think of it."



"Really, Mr. Porlick!" exclaimed the governess, flushing scarlet and with shining eyes.

"Oh, it's no good flying into a temper or beginning to cry. I'm your master, and it's my duty to tell you the truth in plain English, and I'm not the man to shirk my duty, whatever other people may do. By the way, who's the man?"

Miss Groves looked down, and her face flushed a deeper crimson.

"Come, out with it!" said Mr. Porlick.

"I think I'd better not tell you."

"Ah!" he cried triumphantly; "you're ashamed of him!"

The governess lifted her eyes boldly, and indignation shone through the tears.

"I'm nothing of the kind," she said; "I'm very proud of him. It's only that I don't want to make you angrier than you are."

"Who is it?" he shouted.

For one moment she looked at him as though undecided; then, clenching her little fist, she answered—

"It is Mr. Beckton."

"Eh?" he exclaimed, jerking back his head in genuine astonishment; "the fellow that was with me?"

"He was your secretary when I first met him," she said gravely.

"And that's your grand match, is it?" he asked with a strident laugh—"a chap I sent off for gross incompetence. What's he doing now, eh?"

"You had better ask him, Mr. Porlick," said Miss Groves, making a stately little bow. "I think, if you will excuse me, I will go now. I have a temper too, and I begin to feel it."

And, looking her adversary full in the eyes, she repeated the bow and walked out of the room, leaving Mr. Porlick with the wholesome but unpalatable feeling that, after all, he had come off second best in an encounter of his own seeking.



IV

MR. PORLICK'S gloomy prognostications were speedily justified. The first post on Monday brought a black-edged letter, with the Liverpool post mark. He recognized the writing at once.

"DEAR UNCLE,

"My telegram will have prepared you for bad news. Mother died yesterday morning. She seemed to be going on quite well, but took a sudden turn and grew weaker and weaker. At the end it was heart failure. The funeral is to be on Thursday. Len can come up on Saturday, and begin work on Monday, if that is what you wish. I think I see a chance of training for a nurse.

"Yours sincerely,

"JULIA HASTINGS."

"Hm," muttered her uncle, as he read this, "she might have put 'your affectionate niece;' but she knows what's what. I'll do it."

What the "it" referred to will be apparent from his reply.

"MY DR. JULIA,

"I am very sorry to hear yr. sad news. I warned yr. mother not to let the doctors try

their experiments on her, and now you see the result.

"I would have come down to the funeral, but unfortunately I have some pressing business matters that will keep me in town.

"If Len will come, as you say, to start work on Mond., his place will be ready for him. I will take rooms for him near, and will send the address as soon as I know it. By-the-by, why does he not write for himself? Surely a clerk can put pen to paper without wanting his sister to do it for him. Also remember that when you write to a relation, it is usual to sign yrself 'affectionately' not 'sincerely.'

"As to yrself, I suppose you are left without means. I have a great many claims upon me, but you are both of you my sister's children, and as long as you behave yrselves, I will try to help you. I do not approve the idea of yr. training for a nurse, not for the present, at any rate. I will receive you in my own house for a time, and I will make you an allowance for dress, etc., as I do with my own daughter. You had better come up with Len, only *you* book direct to Ealing.

"Yr. aff. Uncle,

"JOSIAH PORLICK.

"P.S.—If you have not enough money to pay yr. fares I will advance it both to you and yr. bro."

It was not till Friday that he received an answer.

"DEAR UNCLE,

"Thank you for your invitation. I will do as you suggest, and give up—for the present, at any

rate—the nursing idea. We have sold our few possessions, and have enough for our fares. We propose to come to-morrow. I think I will go first to Len's rooms with him, and then come on to Ealing. I ought to reach your house before eight in the evening.

"Yours 'affectionately,'

"JULIA HASTINGS."

"What does she put those inverted commas for?" meditated Mr. Porlick. "I don't like that. And why doesn't she do what I tell her?—what's the good of going with that brother of hers first? I'm afraid she's very like poor Jane. Still she's younger, and I ought to be able to break her in."



V

As it happened, there was on that Saturday a special meeting of the Church Missionary Society Association, at which Mr. Porlick had been asked to take the chair. He had accepted the invitation, but not without some misgiving. The truth is, he was beginning to feel that his zeal and liberality had been a little excessive. Some time before, when the Association's funds were very low, he had offered to add twenty-five per cent. to every new subscription over a guinea. The result had been —from the society's point of view — most satisfactory, but to Mr. Porlick it came as a very unpleasant surprise. He had reckoned that his generous offer might involve an outlay of some five or six pounds. Instead, he had to draw a cheque for ten pounds, and the honorary secretary had recently told him, with what he felt to be indecent glee, that his contribution would, she hoped, have to be considerably larger next year. For the first time he was beginning to have serious and anxious doubts with regard to the methods employed by the Society. Meanwhile he showed, by a studied coldness to his colleagues on the committee, that he was becoming dissatisfied.

On this particular occasion he had felt it his duty to be more than usually disagreeable, and



had brow-beaten the honorary secretary, a middle-aged spinster of much piety, but very unbusiness-like habits. One of the curates had made a chivalrous attempt to intervene on her behalf, a circumstance which Mr. Porlick welcomed as affording him an opportunity of giving the young man "a bit of his mind." At the same time he felt that the sense of the meeting was against him, and this irritated him exceedingly. Worst of all, he himself was conscious of the true motive underlying his behaviour. He knew that he really wanted and meant to lighten what he considered the tax upon his purse, and he also knew that his real motive was one he durst not avow. Even the best disciplined conscience will occasionally—on the most unexpected occasions, it may be—lift up its voice, and his, having been pretty well silenced as to the general trend of his business policy, still sometimes showed signs of insubordination over extraneous matters.

It was nine o'clock when he reached home, and it was only as he put his latch-key in the door that he remembered his niece's arrival was overdue. He was still vexed with her for disobeying his very precise directions, and he determined to let her see from the first that his displeasure, even in trifles, was not itself a trifle.

He walked into the dining-room, for the drawing-room fire was only lighted on special occasions, and saw at once that the stranger had arrived. She was sitting on a low chair at the foot of Lizzie's sofa. The moment Mr. Porlick appeared, she rose, and, without the least shyness or hesitation, advanced to meet him. As a rule he was offended by anything that indicated what he termed a lack



of femininity, but on this occasion he was too astonished to be sensitive, and for the moment he even forgot his carefully-nursed displeasure.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, as he took the hand she extended, "you are your mother over again!"

She smiled, and immediately her uncle felt the illusion begin to pass. Her smile was different, and a new expression came over her face. It was no longer his sister standing before him.

"What time did your train get in?" he asked abruptly.

"Seven, or a few minutes after."

"Why, I didn't go out till a quarter to eight," he answered, as though he were convicting her of a lie.

"I didn't get here till half-past, or later, did I?" and she looked round at Mrs. Porlick.

"Then you didn't do what I told you." A frown was gathering on Mr. Porlick's forehead.

"No," she answered simply, as though it were the most natural thing in the world; "I thought it best to go with Len."

"Then I am sorry to say it shows you have not yet learned one of the most important lessons in life—to obey those who are older and wiser than yourself. Amy, ring for prayers, will you?"

Julia flushed painfully, and flashed an indignant glance round the room as if asking for sympathy. Finding every eye carefully averted or cast down, she withdrew to her seat, where she sat upright, her eyes upon her uncle, on her broad white brow a frown which might almost have been the shadow of the one which he had worn a moment before.

Halfway through the long chapter of the



Romans, she felt a gentle pressure on her arm. Looking round, she saw a movement under the rug on the sofa. It was Lizzie's foot. The visitor raised her eyes to meet a quick bright smile of intelligence and sympathy. She smiled back, and the frown disappeared.

As soon as prayers were over, she turned to Mrs. Porlick.

"I feel rather tired, aunt," she said; "I think I should like to go to bed, please."

"Did your brother find a letter from me?" asked Mr. Porlick, as she came to him with outstretched hand.

"Yes," she answered; "he will be very pleased to come to-morrow."

Mr. Porlick, whose good humour was apparently quite restored, ignored her hand and kissed her, in spite of a distinct holding back on her part. But there was no holding back when Lizzie followed her father's example.

"Ah," exclaimed Mr. Porlick, looking on his family from the hearthrug, when the door was hardly closed on his niece, "a fine girl—the very image of her mother—wants training, though. She's had her first lesson to-night—nothing like beginning at once."

VI

THE next day, when Mr. Porlick and his family returned from church, they found Leonard Hastings awaiting them. It was, perhaps, just as well that Mr. Porlick himself lingered at the gate discussing politics with a friend who had walked home with him. He was thus saved the surprise which awaited the others. As soon as the hall door was opened, they heard the piano being played in a fashion to which they were not accustomed. Ellen, who was in front, walked straight into the drawing-room. There, seated before the Broadwood grand, was a thin, fair-haired young man, hardly more than a boy, with light eyes that were now dancing with glee as his fingers flew over the keys. There was no music on the stand; he was evidently playing from memory or extemporizing. On the sofa, by the newly lit fire, lay Lizzie, her eyes, too, lit up, and her cheeks flushed with excitement.

"Oh, Ellen," she cried, "do listen! Isn't it wonderful? He can play anything, and make it up as he goes along!"

The player stopped, shut the piano, rose, and stood awkwardly, blushing like a schoolgirl.

"She asked me if I could play," he began.

The thought flashed into Ellen's mind, "And his mother died less than a week ago!" but she went up to him, holding out her hand

"You are my cousin Len," she said. "Oh, here are the others," she added, as her mother came into the room followed by Julia and the boys.

Mrs. Porlick greeted the new-comer kindly, and Julia went up to him and kissed him with such emphasis that Hugh was moved to a spirited imitation, Lizzie being the victim. Every one burst out laughing except Len, who turned a deeper red, cast his eyes down, and looked annoyed. Before Mrs. Porlick had time to rebuke her youngest son, the head of the family entered the room. He was evidently in a very good humour.

"Ah, Leonard!" he exclaimed; "so you have found your way all right. I'm glad to see you have made friends with your cousins already. Let's look at you, boy."

And taking hold of the reluctant youth by the arm, he led him to the window, and gravely inspected him as he might have done a new gas-stove or kitchen-range.

"Ah well," he remarked consolingly, as he released the victim, "we didn't make ourselves."

The brother and sister were a strange contrast. There was between them only a year—barely that. But while Julia looked a grown woman, Len was still quite the boy. She was tall for her twenty years, still somewhat angular, but with all the promise of a fine figure. Her face, though not pretty, was attractive, because of the power and intelligence written plainly upon it. Two positive beauties she possessed—clear, luminous eyes and a wealth of wavy, soft, brown hair.

Her brother was nearly as tall, but of a slighter build. He stooped slightly, flushed easily, and had a curious little nervous cough. His hands

were long and well-shaped, the fingers, thin and extraordinarily lissom, were constantly busy, lacing and interlacing with each other. A greater contrast to his sister, and incidentally to Mr. Porlick, could hardly be imagined. It is no wonder that the great man turned away from the inspection of his nephew with feelings of disappointment.

Sunday dinner at Goldcroft was generally rather a solemn function. "Secular subjects," as Mr. Porlick termed them, were not expressly forbidden, but were understood to be inappropriate, and though the younger members of the household were inclined to chafe at the limitation, they stood too much in awe of their father to provoke any unnecessary conflict. Upon this occasion the absence of Miss Groves, to whom Mrs. Porlick and both the girls were sincerely attached, and the presence of the cousins in their deep mourning, invested the meal with unusual gloom. Fortunately, Mr. Porlick found a good deal to criticise in the sermon. The preacher was the curate who had incurred his wrath the night before, and Mr. Porlick's wrath was not in the habit of setting with the sun.

"A very poor sermon this morning," he began, as soon as grace was over. "Considering Shore's stipend, he really might get competent men to do his work if he doesn't feel inclined to do it himself."

"Mr. Shore's out of town, father," remarked Herbert, a tall grave youth in spectacles.

"Well, what if he is?" asked his father, sharply. "That's exactly what I say. If he chooses to trapes about, the least he can do is to find a decent deputy. What would happen to a business if it were run on such principles?"



"Shutters up," said Herbert, sententiously.

"Yes, indeed, shutters up; quite right, Herbert," said Mr. Porlick, approvingly. "But the Church shutters never go up, and the clergy know it. That's one of the good features of Nonconformity, I must say. If your minister doesn't do his part, you just put your hands in your pockets and don't pull 'em out again till he comes to his senses. That's business, that is. Now this young Reddy, he's got the gift of the gab, no doubt, but he's no practical sense. He's like a big balloon. Let him once get away out of your reach, and he'll sail away ever so high over your head. But just prick him with a question or two before he gets off, and he doubles up to nothing. Oh, I know the sort. I gave him a piece of my mind last night. Impudent young jackanapes! I don't like the way he talks about Holy Scripture either. There's a freedom, I suppose he'd call it—I call it irreverence—that shocks me. I'm going to have a serious talk to Shore about it."

"He's very kind, father," said Liz, from her sofa.

"Kind? Oh yes, I dare say he is. Some of the worst scamps I have ever known have been kind to every one except their creditors."

From criticisms of the man, Mr. Porlick soon passed to strictures upon the sermon, which kept him in good spirits till the end of the meal.

As they rose from the dinner-table, Mr. Porlick said, looking towards his niece and nephew—

"Come into my study, will you, both of you; I want to have a word with you."

The sense of power was Mr. Porlick's prime luxury. As he looked at the two young figures, the

thought that he held their destinies—insignificant, no doubt—in the hollow of his hand was pleasant to him, and inclined him to something like generosity. Moreover, he was almost startled by the likenesses which recalled to his mind his sister and her husband. In one respect he had been surprised and perhaps a little disappointed. Remembering the rooms in which he had seen his sister living when he visited her at Manchester, he had expected to find the children awkward and out of place in the comparative luxury of Goldcroft. He acknowledged to himself now that he might and ought to have known better. He had underestimated Jane's ambition and ability. With her husband, indeed, she had evidently been unable to do much, but with the boy and girl she had had a better chance, and had availed herself of it. Neither of them had seemed, even to his critical eye, out of place in drawing-room or dining-room.

"Now," he said, taking out a pocket-knife and beginning to trim his nails, "I want to have a serious talk with you. You are young to have to face the world; but there it is, and you must take things as you find them. It's never any good trying to run away from facts; you've got to look 'em in the face, like I did. You're better off than I was, for I had no one to give me a hand."

Here Mr. Porlick suddenly appeared to become absorbed in rounding off an obstinate corner. In reality an episode of the long past had risen before his mind, when an elder sister had come to his rescue in time of need. "I paid her back, though," he said to himself, "and then we were quits again. Fuss enough she made about the trifle, too." Then he went on—

"Of course there *are* occasions on which it is a duty to help one's nearest relatives, when, for instance, it is quite clear that, by giving some small, temporary assistance, a clear, permanent benefit will result; but I'm no believer in sloppy benevolence—what that means is that the one who gives is poorer, and the one who takes is not a bit richer."

Neither of his hearers had been able to follow the transition in his thoughts. But while Len, with head bent down, was tracing the pattern on the carpet and humming a tune under his breath, Julia knit her brow, anxiously endeavouring to make out her uncle's drift. Instinctively, she felt there was something coming, if not already said, which it behoved her to resent; but the feeling was indefinite, and she waited impatiently.

"You are quite unprovided for, I suppose?" said Mr. Porlick, looking at Len, who, however, still studied the carpet.

"We have three pounds sixteen shillings and fourpence between us," said Julia, in her clear incisive voice, that carried Mr. Porlick forty years back again.

He nodded. "That's right; know where you stand. Well, it's not a great fortune, but it's better than nothing. Your things must have fetched more than I should have thought."

"My piano went," said Len, looking up; "we got most of the money from that."

"Piano!" exclaimed Mr. Porlick, in astonishment (he had not heard Len's performance). "Well, I never! What next? So you had a piano, had you? I should have thought your mother had more sense."

"Uncle!" exclaimed Julia, with a catch in her

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voice, "don't speak like that of mother. We won't hear a word against her from any one, will we, Len?"

"No," said the boy, in a voice that was almost a sob. As he spoke he raised his eyes, and they brimmed with tears. Julia's were dry and hard.

"Oh, come, come, don't let us have any nonsense," exclaimed Mr. Porlick. "I'm not saying anything against her. Nine mothers out of ten spoil their children."

"There was no question of spoiling," said Julia. "I can't play a note, but Len was always passionately fond of music, and father was, too. And he wished Len to cultivate it; and mother would have done anything in the world that he wished, and so would we."

At this stage Len broke down altogether, and began sobbing.

"Oh, of course, if you can't control yourselves, I won't say what I was going to," said Mr. Porlick, with cold displeasure.

It was not that he was heartless, but he felt that he ought to express sympathy, and he also felt incapable of doing so. This was a combination of feelings that always annoyed him extremely.

Julia recovered her self-command at once, though not without an effort.

"You must excuse us, uncle," she said, with a brave attempt at a smile. "We have been through a good deal the last fortnight, and Len was only just recovering from a breakdown."

"Well, well," said Mr. Porlick, "I don't want to be hard on either of you. All I wanted to do was to tell you plainly at once what I propose doing for



you, but if you would rather put it off, I will speak to you next Sunday."

"No, please," said the girl, "we would much rather you spoke at once."

"Very well," said her uncle; "then, just attend. I told your mother I would make a berth for you, Leonard, as junior clerk, at seventy-five pounds a year. Since then I have made inquiries, and I find the cost of living is now somewhat higher than I had reckoned. I have found you the rooms where you now are, and I have taken them for you for three months certain, at the rate of sixty-six pounds ten shillings per annum for board and lodging. That would leave you eight pounds ten shillings for clothes and pocket-money. With great care you might perhaps manage on that, but it would be close work, and I have made up my mind to start you at eighty-five pounds. If your progress and conduct are thoroughly satisfactory, you will rise ten pounds every year. I shall treat you, remember, exactly as I should if you were no relation or connection of mine. It will depend on you yourself entirely whether you rise or whether you get the sack, as you certainly will if you prove yourself idle or inefficient. As for you, my dear, this is what I propose. I have just sent away the governess who has been looking after Lizzie. The child is delicate, as you can see for yourself, and needs some one to be with her—a sort of companion, you know. She seems to have taken to you already, and I am sure you will find pleasure in being with her. You will be treated quite like one of the family, except, perhaps, when there are dinner-parties, and I shall also give you as pocket-money twenty pounds a year, which will enable you to dress

properly and, if you are careful, to put something away."

As he finished this sentence he polished the blade of his knife with his handkerchief, shut it up, and put it back in his pocket.

"Thank you, uncle," said Julia. "I shall be very glad to stay here for a time; but I am anxious to be earning something, so that Len and I can keep house together."

Mr. Porlick frowned.

"I have told you what I think best," he said; "you can follow my advice or not, as you please; only you will understand that you must fall in with the arrangements altogether, or not at all. If you" —it was at Julia he looked—"refuse my offer, you must both of you make other plans of your own."

The brother and sister exchanged a rapid glance; but their uncle, watching them narrowly, could learn nothing of its meaning. The crimson on Julia's cheek and her tightly clenched lips told him more.

"Well?" he said roughly.

"We will do as you wish," she began; but he interrupted.

"Wish! It's not a question of wishing. Any one would think you were doing me a favour."

"We will do as you suggest," said Julia, who seemed to have recovered her self-command completely, "at any rate, for the present."

"No, no, no!" cried Mr. Porlick; "I won't have any limitations or conditions. Yes or no?"

A frown, not unworthy of her uncle, appeared on Julia's white forehead. There was a pause. Suddenly Len spoke up.

"Yes," he said.

"What do you say, Julia?"

"I say what Len says."

"Yes or no?" cried Mr. Porlick, who was now thoroughly enjoying himself.

"Yes," said Julia, her voice clear and hard.

"Very good; that's settled, then, and we understand one another. Do you sing, either of you?"

"I do," said Len, looking up quickly.

"I hardly know one note from another," said Julia.

"Ah! I only asked because we generally have hymns after tea, and they'll be glad of an extra voice or two. Now, if you'll go into the drawing-room you'll find your aunt and cousins there. I have a report of our Missionary Society Association to draft."

As they closed the door behind them, Mr. Porlick smiled to himself contentedly.

"It's a perfectly wonderful likeness; but this time I've got the whip-hand of her. We're getting on quite fast. She's had lesson number two already."

VII

THE new arrangements at business and at home gave Mr. Porlick considerable satisfaction. He enjoyed the luxury of appearing as a family benefactor. He had interposed, he told himself, as a special Providence, on behalf of his sister's children. At the same time he was conscious that, as things had turned out, his benevolence was saving instead of costing him money. Len was soon able to do John's work, and he did it for forty-five pounds a year less. Similarly, Julia's "pocket-money" was just half Miss Groves' salary. Altogether he was certainly sixty pounds to the good.

On the whole he was fairly well pleased with his nephew. The boy was a bit harum-scarum and careless, but under strict discipline, he would soon improve. His progress in shorthand was satisfactory, and in a week he worked the Remington as his cousin, with all his months of practice, had never learned to do. Moreover, when the machine went wrong, he put it right with an ease and dexterity that made Mr. Porlick think of the inventor of the Newdigate bolt. The only thing that annoyed him was that, as the lad's awe of him wore off and he became accustomed to his new surroundings, he began to show a cheerful

indifference, doing his work indeed, but without that air of whole-hearted absorption which was so pleasing in Mr. Porlick's eyes. One bad habit needed constant and stern repression—the humming of tunes during business hours.

"No one," said Mr. Porlick, "is fonder of good music than I am, and I have often been complimented on the correctness of my ear, but everything has its proper time and place, and I will not—I repeat, I *will not*—have this ridiculous humming, or singing, or whatever you call it, during business hours."

The boarding-house to which Mr. Porlick had sent his nephew was in Charlotte Street, Tottenham-court Road. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Cross, whose name was on the fanlight over the door, was little more than a caretaker, Mr. Porlick himself being not only landlord, but practically, by virtue of his advances, proprietor too. And as he, in his sleepless activity where his property was concerned, was in the habit of paying frequent surprise visits to Charlotte Street, it had occurred to him that he might at the same time keep an eye on his nephew. By this arrangement Mr. Porlick secured a couple of valuable spies: Len upon the boarding-house, and Mrs. Cross upon Len.

Of the relations existing between his uncle and his landlady, Len had at first no idea, and he wondered at the air of authority with which Mr. Porlick went from room to room, and at the deference paid him by the servants as well as by Mrs. Cross herself.

His life was dull enough. The tiny bedroom on the third floor, and the severe simplicity of the living, were no hardships to him, for he had been

brought up under even more Spartan conditions than these. But he was a sociable young fellow, and had been accustomed to cronies. Here, surrounded by a company of strangers, he found himself alone. Most of the other boarders were men and women of over forty, engaged in business houses, and they made no advances. On the contrary, he found his tentative overtures treated with a coldness that looked very like suspicion. But, two or three weeks after his arrival, a new boarder appeared; a man who looked nearer fifty than forty, with fair, reddish hair, beginning to turn grey, carefully waxed moustache, and a frock coat rather shiny in prominent places, but fastened so tightly all the way up, as to give the wearer quite a military air. He sat next Len at dinner, and from the very first proved most affable. Indeed, he made himself agreeable all round, and went far out of his way to entice Mrs. Cross herself into the conversation. The poor lady was, as a rule, a nonentity, her constant worries and anxieties having worn away all her spirit and vivacity. Indeed, dinner was never a very boisterous meal at Charlotte Street, most of the diners being pretty well tired out by their day's work. The newcomer's brisk demeanour seemed quite a startling contrast.

He began by addressing a few general remarks to Len on the weather. Then, suddenly looking towards the head of the table, he made a ceremonious little bow to Mrs. Cross.

"We were just saying, Mrs. Cross, how charming London is in the early spring."

The landlady flushed with surprise at this sudden address.

"Yes, Mr. Vincent, it is indeed. No, Mary, the potatoes here."

"They talk about the beauty of Florence and Naples," continued Len's neighbour, "but there's nothing in either to match the London parks in April and May."

"Have you been to those same places yourself, sir, may I ask?" inquired a tall, pale man, with a very bald head, who sat nearly opposite.

"I spent—let's see—two years in Naples, and six months or so in Florence," answered Mr. Vincent.

"Indeed; did you really; travelled, I suppose?"

"Well, it's difficult to get to Italy without," said the stranger.

A smile rippled round the table at this sally, and Mr. Skinner—this was the bald man's name—nodded approvingly.

"Quite so, sir," he remarked, "and there's nothing like foreign travel, I've always heard, for opening the mind."

"That's perfectly true. When I was about your age"—here Mr. Vincent turned and looked at Len—"I went half over the world with Tom Carlton—you've heard of him—he was special correspondent for the *Morning Post* and the *Standard*, and a lot of provincial papers. A wonderful fellow he was—taught me more than any other six men."

It was contrary to etiquette at Charlotte Street to ask directly what a man's occupation might be, but while the dinner was being cleared away, three or four of the men gathered round the fire and pulled out their pipes. Mr. Vincent produced a formidable-looking case which might quite possibly have been made of silver, and

offered Len a cigarette. The lad was not a smoker, but such an offer in such a company was not to be refused. For a minute or two they all puffed away in silence. Then a meek-looking man with spectacles, and an intermittent smile that seemed to come and go almost with the regularity of a revolving lighthouse lamp, gave a little cough, and remarked—

"Shocking murder over at Wandsworth."

"Ah," said Mr. Skinner, "you may well say shocking. I don't think newspapers should be allowed to publish such things—I don't indeed."

"Then you must allow me to differ," exclaimed Mr. Vincent, loudly. "The free publication of news among the people is the palladium of liberty. Take away the freedom of the press, and where are we?"

"Undoubtedly, sir," said Mr. Skinner; "I have the greatest admiration for the press. It is only one or two papers I was referring to."

"Which might they be?" inquired Mr. Vincent, blandly.

"Well, the *Police News* for one. I assure you the illustrations get on my nerves sometimes."

"The *Police News!*" cried the stranger, with infinite contempt. "I thought you were referring to the daily press. It was that provoked me to some warmth, I am afraid."

"Not at all, sir," interjected Mr. Skinner.

"But you must pardon me. I have been connected with journalism for many years, and any reflection on my colleagues always excites me."

"I meant none, I can assure you," exclaimed Mr. Skinner, overjoyed at having, without any breach of etiquette, discovered the new boarder's occupation.

A few minutes later, the little conclave broke up, and Len found himself left alone with the stranger.

"Anything to do with literature?" asked Mr. Vincent, suddenly. He had been studying the boy in silence for a minute or two.

Len was happily ignorant of the Charlotte Street code, and felt no resentment. He simply shook his head.

"No, I'm a clerk."

"Indeed, well, you surprise me. There's a look about you—you remind me of young Courtenay, a regular Nonpareil he was. If he'd lived he'd have been one of the tip-tops. Poetry, prose, reviews, reports, leaders, anything, that young fellow could do at five minutes' notice. And to hear him fiddle—good Lord! talk of Pag., why this boy could make the strings *bleed*—there's a metaphor for you, my lad!—I've sat and cried like a baby when he's been playing."

"I'm fond of music myself," said Len, in a half whisper, but with kindling eyes.

"Ah!" cried the other, triumphantly, "I thought as much. It's not often Dick Vincent's mistaken. You've got it written on your face that you're something out of the common."

As he spoke, he looked round the room, and uttered an exclamation when his eye rested on a shabby old piano in the darkest corner of the room. It had belonged to Mrs. Cross's father, and had suffered many things from three generations of learners before lapsing into its present condition of dumb waiter.

"Let's have a tune," he said; and, lifting the lid, disclosed the yellow keys.

Nothing loth, the lad pulled up a chair, and ran his fingers lightly over the keys. He laughed at the tinkle, but here and there were a few notes still fairly resonant. He stopped for a moment, and then began again. Scores of accomplished young ladies could have given him excellent advice as to his "technique." Scores of admirable teachers would have shaken their wise heads and told him, "*that* is no good." But, if one of the veritable masters had heard the boy, he would have recognized in a moment the cruel, tantalizing gift of the gods, and sighed for another child of genius, born into an unresponsive world.

It was an old tune, and very familiar that he began with, nothing other, in fact, than "Home, Sweet Home;" but, even as he played the simple melody, the man beside him felt the weaving of the charm, or, perhaps, it would be more correct to say that the charm was round and over him before he knew what was happening. And when the boy began to improvise upon his theme, tossing it about from bass to treble and back again, disguising it and revealing, playing, it seemed, a hundred tricks with it, and then suddenly making the ramshackle old strings sing forth, as at their best they had never done, "the lilt of love's despair," the listener clapped him on the shoulder.

"Another find, by Jove!" he cried. "Why, my lad, you're a born genius! Courtenay himself was no better with his fiddle! Go on, dear boy."

And Len, only too willing, played on, shuddering sometimes at the dreadful notes, but quickly learning, as by instinct, to avoid the worst. Warming to his work, he played piece after piece, till a sudden burst of clapping recalled him to

self-consciousness. He looked round quickly, in consternation, to find six or seven of the boarders, mostly ladies, gathered round, looking at him with admiring gaze. Mrs. Cross herself formed one of the semicircle.

"Oh, Mr. Hastings!" she exclaimed, "I had no idea you could play like that. It reminds me so of my dear husband."

And Len was spared any knowledge of the fact that the late Mr. Cross was a dancing-master with a very pretty taste in polkas.

VIII

FROM that time Len's loneliness in London became a thing of the past. He found himself at a bound the most popular person in the house. The other boarders actually clubbed together to import a tuner, and after-dinner music became a regular feature of the establishment. The only drawback was that Mr. Skinner volunteered to sing, and his offer having, in the first instance, been rashly accepted, it was afterwards difficult, if not impossible, to limit his vocal output. Unfortunately, he had a friend in one of the large music-publishing houses, and could borrow songs indefinitely. It was still more unfortunate that what he called his "organ" was loud and harsh, with a curious metallic twang in certain of its notes that at first sounded merely comic, but soon got on the listeners' nerves and became almost intolerable.

With Mr. Vincent, Len soon became intimate. Indeed, the elder man treated him with so much deference and to so much praise, that it was little wonder the boy was won. Mr. Vincent was perfectly frank, or at any rate appeared to be so, as to his own pursuits and prospects. He had been connected, he said, with literature all his life. His father had been a brilliant scholar, and he himself was an M.A. of Edinburgh. He showed Len a



faded copy of a book he had written thirty years before—"Types of Literary Form" it was called.

"Ah, my boy," he exclaimed, as he turned over the pages, "that was my golden age. I had the world—the literary world—at my feet, and it is only my cursed folly that kicked it right away. There wasn't an editor then that wouldn't say 'thank you' for an article, while now they wouldn't so much as waste a penny stamp in sending it back. It's a hard world, boy, if you miss your chance."

Sometimes he was even more explicit.

"One small weakness, and talent—I won't say genius—but undoubted talent, wide culture, industry, and the manners of the best society, all go for nothing. It does seem hard; but there! it's no good grumbling."

What the "one small weakness" was, Len was quite sagacious enough to guess. He had seen something of it at home, and knew the symptoms only too well.

He soon understood Vincent's position. He was a literary hack, acting as sub-editor of the *Augur*, a weekly devoted to sport, scandal, and "finance." There was very little money behind it, and the pay was very irregular. The income derived from it had to be eked out by potboilers and paragraphs. His mornings were frequently spent in the reading-room of the British Museum, and sometimes his afternoons too. But, in one way or another, he had formed a large circle of acquaintances, most of them living on the borders, some in the very heart of Bohemia. Among these was a Galician Jew named Melzer, or Melser as he was generally called, a musician, stranded, no one knew how or why, in England, often hungry,

generally dirty, with long, black corkscrew curls hanging down on his greasy coat-collar. How he kept body and soul together was a mystery. Sometimes, Vincent said, he had pupils, but his broken English and his abrupt manners were all against him, and he could never build up a connection. This strange man came to dinner at Charlotte Street one evening as Vincent's guest, and after the meal was over, he sat down before the ancient piano, and stooping till his curls almost touched the keys, played brilliantly for ten minutes or more, perfectly indifferent to the feelings of his audience. Then, when he got up, with a shrug and a frown, exclaiming—

"Eet is a verdammte clavier, but I not play one for so long,"

Vincent pushed Len down on the stool.

The boy had been impressed by Melser's execution, and still more by the last thing he had played—a plaintive Hebrew melody. And as—when music was concerned—he was neither nervous nor diffident, he took this air as his theme, and began improvising variations on it, a favourite amusement of his. Melser had turned away towards the dining-table, where he was now surveying, with a disappointed face, the empty board, when Len began. Before he had played a dozen notes, the jet-black, gleaming eyes were lifted from the table, and the slouching shabby figure came shambling across the room. Vincent smiled.

"Ach!" cried the Jew, "vot haf we here? Is it anozer Mozart?" And, pulling a chair close to the player, he sat down and began to hum and beat time, shaking his head till the curls waved about like pendulums.

When the variations ceased, he put his hand on Len's shoulder.

"You know her?" he asked.

"Her? Whom do you mean, sir?" said Len, puzzled.

"Ze Kol Nidrei—ze air you now spielen."

"What I've just been playing? Oh no, I never heard it till you played it."

"Zen," said the Jew, solemnly, looking round, "I tell you all, I shall make him one great musicker—yes, you shall to me come, and you shall be ver great—so great als Tausig—ach, viel greater it may be—who know? You haf ze fine touch, and you see ze museek behind ze notes, ze ting-ting, outworn notes."

And he drummed contemptuously on two or three of the worst.

On the doorstep, when Vincent and Len were seeing him out, the Jew took the boy's hand, and looked at him with his strangely-flashing eyes.

"Have you, perhaps," he said, "mooch moneys?"

"No," answered Len, with a laugh; "I only wish I had. I'm as poor as a church mouse."

"Ach, well, never mind," returned Melser, "I vill teach you all ze same."

IX

THE March winds and the April showers had done their part, and the May flowers had begun before this to brighten the trim beds at Goldcroft. Mr. Porlick always favoured bulbs. He could get special terms for considerable quantities from a Dutch firm, with which he had had business transaction some years before, and they increased in the ground. Besides, they made a brave show, well massed, and he had no eye for the violet or anything else that allowed itself to remain "half-hidden."

It had been one of those very warm spring days that sometimes come to tempt the eager gardener to his ruin. Mrs. Porlick and Ellen had just come in from a round of calls. As they entered the dining-room Mrs. Porlick sank down in the first chair apparently quite exhausted. Ellen ran upstairs.

"Don't you feel well, aunt?" asked Julia, from the chair by Lizzie's sofa.

"No, my dear," panted Mrs. Porlick; "I think it must be the heat—at the bottom of the hill—never felt anything like it before—thought I should faint—such a pain, too—oh dear!"

"Don't talk, mother," said Ellen, coming into the room quietly; "this will do you good."

And she handed her a glass.

"Oh, Ellen," exclaimed her mother; "it's brandy! What would your father say?"

"Never mind father," answered Ellen; "he's not here, and it's what you want. It comes from my medicine cupboard."

"He would be very angry, if he knew you kept any," said Mrs. Porlick, anxiously, and still speaking with an effort.

"But he won't know. Don't worry about it. You'll soon feel better. You must have Dr. Burnyat."

"Oh no!" exclaimed Mrs. Porlick; "you know how your father objects to doctors. Don't say a word about this to him, any of you. It's just the heat and that dreadful hill."

"It's no kindness to father," said Ellen; "if you get ill, he'll have a long bill to pay, whereas if you have the doctor at once, it may only cost a few shillings."

"But I'm not going to be ill. I beg you'll not say any more about it. *Your* medicine seems to have done me good already."

And she smiled at her daughter.

Julia had left the room, and now returned, carrying her aunt's shoes. She put them on the floor by Mrs. Porlick's chair.

"Let me be your maid, aunt," she said.

As she stood by Ellen, the family likeness was very marked. A year younger, Julia was quite an inch taller, and built after a sturdier model. But they both had the broad square brow, the strong mouth and chin, and the resolute eye. Ellen had the more comely face—Julia's was, perhaps, a shade the stronger.

They were good friends, too. Indeed, the stranger had found her niche in the house. She had got on well with the boys from the first,

and she and Liz had quickly passed from like to love. The only member of the household with whom she was not at her ease was her redoubtable uncle. Him she heartily detested. And, unfortunately, she was not an adept in concealing her sentiments.

Not that her evident coldness troubled Mr. Porlick. On the contrary, he had set himself the task of "breaking her in," as he put it, and he was quite prepared to find it an arduous one. Any little exhibition of temper was just an incident of the process, not to be forgotten, but nothing to excite surprise. His hand was heavy upon her; it was natural she should wriggle a bit.

In pursuance of his purpose, he constantly interfered to thwart her most innocent and trifling plans.

If she arranged to go down for a Saturday afternoon with Len in town, either she would be required to keep Liz company while the others were out, or Len himself would be detained at the office. When she expressed her intention of learning shorthand, he told her point-blank that she was not to do it, and, without any explicit statement, he made it quite plain that, if she persisted, the punishment would fall on Len as well as on her. She was exceedingly anxious that her brother should spend his Sundays with her, and almost begged her aunt to invite him. As soon as this reached Mr. Porlick's ears, he took care that he should be asked only once in the month, and refused her leave to go down to him.

This policy of keeping the brother and sister apart was, however, more than a mere incident in the process of breaking in. Mr. Porlick had already

discovered that Len's heart was not in his work, and, remembering what he had heard at home as to the lad's wonderful performances on the piano, he guessed that "vagrant, discreditable desires"—this was Mr. Porlick's description of Euterpe—were seducing him from his allegiance to business and a single-hearted devotion to his uncle's interests. And he shrewdly suspected that in this matter the sister might sympathize with, and help, her brother.

But it had not escaped his penetrating observation that the affection was more pronounced on her side than on his. Indeed, in dealing with his niece he had this great advantage, that he could interpret her character and disposition by reference to his sister, whom she so greatly resembled. And even with regard to Len, the memory of the inventor of the Newdigate bolt came to his assistance, so that he felt pretty confident that he could read both their characters in large, fair type.

One evening Mr. Porlick came home earlier than usual. It was a habit with him to come in at different times. He was never later than seven, for the dinner-hour was sacred; but he had been known to reach home as early as half-past four. On this occasion it was a quarter-past six. He came in quietly, as he usually did when he arrived before he was expected, and walked straight into the drawing-room. There he found only Lizzie playing draughts with Julia.

Lizzie looked up with a smile of welcome.

"Father dear, you *are* early. What have you brought me from the city?"

But Mr. Porlick turned and went out, shutting the door behind him with a bang.

"Oh dear!" cried Liz, with a little sigh, "things have gone wrong again"

And long before dinner was served all the family knew that there was thunder in the air.

Trouble began before the first mouthful, for Hugh did not come down till grace had been said.

"I didn't hear the bell," he said, as he took his seat, with a gallant but unsuccessful attempt to seem quite at his ease.

"Where's your watch?" snapped his father.

"In my pocket."

"Answer me again like that and you leave the room."

Hugh reddened, and a very disagreeable expression clouded his face; but he said nothing, and the meal proceeded.

Presently Mr. Porlick abruptly addressed Julia.

"That precious brother of yours has been leading me a life!"

She looked up with a quick, apprehensive glance that was not lost upon her uncle.

"What has he been doing?" she asked; "nothing very dreadful, I hope."

"I don't know what you call dreadful," he replied, "but I know that he wastes my time as well as his own. His shorthand is simply disgraceful. I don't believe he works at it at all in the evenings."

"I thought he went to an evening class," said Julia.

"So I thought, but I begin to doubt it very much. I believe he wastes his evenings in some much less creditable way."

"Do you *know* that he does?" asked Julia, her voice beginning to grow strident.

"If I had known I should have said so; I gene-ally say what I mean. I've had one straight talk vith him, and I shall soon have another."

"Father," said Lizzie, from her sofa, "I believe 'm the only one you never have straight talks vith."

For a moment the cloud lifted from Mr. Porlick's ace.

"You shall have one when the time comes;" and ıe smiled and nodded to her.

Whereupon Mrs. Porlick, in her anxiety to create ı divėrsion, made an unlucky remark. "I wonder vhy John doesn't write," she said; "it must be nore than ten days since we had a letter."

Then the secret of her husband's ill-humour ɔecame apparent.

"*I* don't wonder at all," he exclaimed bitterly; 'I don't know what young fellows are coming to ıowadays. I've had a letter from Gamble. He loesn't like to say too much, but I can see what he neans. That young fool is kicking over the traces. He'll find other people can kick, too."

Mr. Porlick spoke loudly, for his wife to hear. t was nothing to him when he was angry that the ervant was in the room. All the world might hear ıis righteous indignation.

Mrs. Porlick was agitated, and her hand shook ıs she folded her napkin with elaborate care.

"Mr. Gamble may be mistaken. I'm sure we :an trust John, brought up as he has been."

"Oh, it's no good talking like that," shouted her ıusband; "Gamble knows what's what, and he says :oo little rather than too much. As for trusting, :hat's all bunkum. Trust as far as you can see, if ɣou've got uncommonly good sight. That's the

only safe rule. Look here"—he turned suddenly to Julia—"you think I'm a hard man. I am, and I'm proud of it. Life's hard, and death's hard, and God Almighty's hard. It's a hard world, and the only way to conquer it is to be a little harder." Here he dropped his voice and spoke slowly, with a certain impressiveness. "I've done it too, thank the Lord. I haven't owed a penny, or told a lie, or said behind a man's back what I wouldn't say to his face, since I was seventeen. That's something to be able to say when you're sixty, and what I've been so far I'll be to the end. Now then. *For what we have received may the Lord make us thankful. Amen.*"

"You've never been very hard to me," said the thin, piping voice from the sofa as the family got up from their seats. "I want you to show me something in this book-keeping."

And Lizzie held up a slim school-book.

"All right," said her father, taking the low chair by her side. "What is it?"

And for the next ten minutes the two were engrossed in a huge hypothetical balance-sheet.

Yet even this delightful occupation did not entirely engross Mr. Porlick. As his wife walked to the door he called out—

"I suppose you're all coming back to sit here. There's no need to light the gas in the drawing-room."

By the time the balance-sheet was straightened the two were alone and the dinner things removed.

"You're splendid at figures, father," said Lizzie, leaning back with a little tired sigh that slipped out unawares.

"Pooh!" said Mr. Porlick, though secretly

delighted, "that's nothing. When you get on a bit I'll show you something. You *are* getting on, though, I must say. It's a great pity you're not a boy. I could have made a capital berth for a lad like you."

"Father," said Lizzie, lifting her face as the big man stooped to kiss her, "you always keep your promises, don't you?"

"Yes, of course," he answered, but with the faintest note of apprehension. "What is it now, eh?"

"You said I might have Dr. Burnyat when I really wished, didn't you?"

Mr. Porlick frowned.

"Did I?" he said. "When did I say such a silly thing?"

"The last time I was bad; and it wasn't silly, because you know I hate having him as much as you do."

"Well then——" he began.

"Why, I want to have him just once," she coaxed.

"What for? Do you feel ill?"

"I want to try something. We generally wait till I'm very bad, and then when he comes he keeps on coming for ever so long."

"Yes, that he does; they all of them do."

"So for once I want to have him before I get so bad, and see if he can't stop it. Just once, father!"

"Well," said Mr. Porlick very ungraciously, "if promised, you shall have your own way this time; but remember, that wipes out the promise. After this you must satisfy me that it's necessary."

"It *is* necessary, father; really it is."

"All very fine," said Mr. Porlick, whose good temper was returning as he considered that he was well out of that stupid promise if it did cost ten shillings; "but I shall have to pay, not you."

"I wish I could," said the child, with a sigh; then, with a sudden inspiration, she exclaimed, "Couldn't you bring me some clerk's work to do? You say if I were only a boy you could find me something to do. Oh, do, father! I should love it so. Market value, mind!"

This was one of Mr. Porlick's favourite phrases when he was talking business, and the sound of it on the child's lips pleased him. Besides, she really could earn the fee. It would be play for her, and a real saving as well. His smile was good to see.

"Very well, little one, you shall have your own way; you generally do, I'm afraid. I'll bring you some awful figures to-morrow, and I'll pay you—market value!"

"Hurrah! You are a dear," cried Liz, clapping her hands joyfully; "fancy me paying Dr. Burnyat with my own cheque."

"Ah!" said Mr. Porlick to himself for the hundredth time, as he went into the hall, "why wasn't she the eldest boy?"

Mr. Porlick was true to his word. Two or three days after his talk with Liz he brought home a really formidable-looking account-book, and showed her how he wanted the items analyzed and classified. The work took her three or four days, but it was admirably done, and the fifteen shillings she received from her delighted father was barely "market value."

The first thing she did with the money was to

send for Dr. Burnyat. As it happened, on the morning when he called, Mrs. Porlick was suffering from the effects of a severe headache, and Julia was waiting on her, while Ellen was having a singing lesson at the local conservatoire. This was exactly what Lizzie had longed for, but had not dared to anticipate. She and the doctor were great friends, though she had spoken the truth when she said that she disliked his professional visits. Now, however, she was eager to see him.

"Oh, Dr. Burnyat!" she exclaimed, as soon as he came in, "this is lucky. I've got something very important to say, and I was afraid some one else might be here."

"Secrets—hey?" said the doctor, putting on his spectacles. "A little feverish, are we?—let's feel the pulse."

"Don't tease. I'm not very bad. I want to tell you the secret first, before any one comes down. You know father doesn't like—I mean he's afraid of doctors."

"Doesn't like their bills," muttered the doctor, under his breath.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. I want to hear the secret."

"Don't laugh. It's not a joke;" and Lizzie frowned—quite a colourable imitation of Mr. Porlick. "Mother's not well, and she ought to see you; but she won't, because she thinks father would be vexed. So I got father to say I might send for you, and I don't feel very well, but it's really mother I want you to see. And—and you're please to send in your—your account to me."

This last sentence was spoken with a delightful mingling of shyness and pride.

The doctor's eyes twinkled.

"Send the bill in to Miss Elizabeth—eh? But you've no idea how they mount up, these doctors' bills."

"Oh yes, I have," she answered naïvely; "but I've got my own money now."

"Oh, that's it, is it? Come into a fortune and going in for luxuries?"

"Yes," she nodded brightly. "Don't tease, doctor dear. Give me something nice and bitter, and then ask to see mother."

"All right," said the doctor, seeing she was really in earnest, and after a brief examination, listened to a full account of Mrs. Porlick's attack.

Then he rang the bell and asked to see her.

The interview with her lasted some time, but, before he left the house, he came into the dining-room.

"You're a very wise young woman," he said, patting her cheek, "and I'm very glad indeed you told me about your mother. It isn't a thing to be neglected."

"But, remember, doctor," she whispered, as her mother opened the door, "the bill is to come in to me."

"Oh, certainly, madam," cried Dr. Burnyat, with an elaborate bow.

X

In spite of his determination to discipline his nephew and niece, even Mr. Porlick could not refuse them an occasional outing together, and one Saturday in June they met at Willesden Junction, and took the train for Kew Bridge. It was a lovely summer day, a glowing sun shining from a cloudless sky, the heat tempered by a delightful breeze. Len was in exuberant spirits, and though Julia at first looked serious, her austerity gradually relaxed, and she gave herself up for the time to pure enjoyment.

For an hour or so they wandered along the paths and through the greenhouses; then they walked to Richmond, climbed the famous hill, and by good fortune found themselves alone on a seat overlooking the beautiful river with its exquisite curve.

"We ought to have had lunch in the town," said Len, almost immediately after they had sat down; "it's hungry work, trapesing about in the sun. Hullo! what have you got there?"

"Sandwiches," answered Julia, unpacking a paper parcel. "I wasn't sure how your finances would be, so I got Aunt Amy to give me these."

"Very thoughtful of you," he said approvingly; "my finances are much as usual."

The girl's face clouded again.

"Oh, Len, I do wish you would be more careful with your money. Don't you remember what mother used to say?"

"Oh yes, of course," he assented, as he set to work on the sandwiches. "I say, uncle's got a good cook."

"How are things going on at Baker Street?" she asked.

"Oh, all right," he replied carelessly. "Uncle's a terror, I can tell you."

"He's a brute with brains," said Julia.

"Yes, lots," assented Len; "and he's got something about him too that knocks you over—at least, it does me. He's got one face that reminds me of mother when she was worked up—you know."

Julia nodded.

"Yes, I know what you mean. I've seen it. But it only makes me wild. I feel as though he'd stolen mother's face as well as father's bolt."

"Oh, I don't know about stealing. He paid for it right enough, though I've no doubt he got a jolly good bargain—he always does."

"I know what mother thought about it," said Julia, setting her lips tight.

"Of course it was aggravating to see the thing such a success. I was thinking about it only the other day. You know that big old portfolio of father's? I opened it and looked through the papers. There were some drawings that looked like the bolt, only different somehow."

"Perhaps they were the rough sketches for it; I'm glad we've got something of father's. He *was* good to us when we were mites."

"Yes," said Len, warmly; "and what an ear ıe had!"

Julia smiled.

"He left it all to you. A hymn-tune is about ıs far as I can go. How's your wonderful Jew?"

"Old Melser? Oh, he's first rate. As mad as . hatter, but full to the brim with music. He's aught me a lot."

"Where do you have your lessons?"

"Oh, anywhere and everywhere. He has a ıare lot of queer friends. Sometimes we pay ior a practice at a music shop, but that comes expensive."

"Uncle seems to think you spend too much time over your music. He was grumbling about your shorthand only a few weeks ago."

"Was he?" asked Len, indifferently. "I don't know why. I'm in grade two, and at this rate, I shall soon be doing speed. But there's no pleasing some people."

"Do you have to pay him much?"

"Uncle?"

"No, of course not. Your Jew."

"Oh no; I give him what I can. He's a queer old chap. I believe he'd teach me for nothing if I hadn't got a penny, and if I offered him five pounds a lesson, he'd take it and hardly say thank you."

"Mad, indeed," said Julia.

"Yes, but it's fine to get him to talk about the musical swells in Germany. He knows them all. The worst of it is he's got such a lingo, and if you don't catch what he means at the first go off, he flies into a regular rage."

"Len," said his sister, after a pause, "do you mean to stick to the business?"

"Not a minute longer than I can help," he answered.

"Then, wouldn't it be better to tell uncle straight out, and ask him if he will advance you enough to study music properly?"

"You can, if you like," he answered, with a comical face; "only don't say I told you to."

"I don't hide behind other people," she said, with a touch of scorn.

"I do, when I get a chance," he laughed.

"If we could make him see that it would be likely to pay, he might be willing," she mused.

"Why shouldn't it?" he cried. "There are lots of men who make a heap of money at it. I say, Ju," he went on, with a change of tone, "how are you off for money? Can you lend me a few shillings? I don't want to ask uncle for an advance."

"No, whatever you do, don't do that," she cried. "Look!"—and she took out her purse—"I can spare you this, quite well, and if you want more, come and tell me."

He took the sovereign she offered him, and put it in his pocket.

"You *are* a brick, Ju, and always were. I'd kiss you if there weren't such a lot of people round. Let's get up and have a look round the park. Then we'll go back through the town, and I'll stand you a handsome tea."

Which he did—out of the sovereign.

XI

JULIA had fully made up her mind to speak at once to her uncle about Len's future, but she was obliged to put off the conversation for a time. The cloud had been resting on Mr. Porlick's brow for some days, and he had been so atrociously rude to every one who was compelled to speak to him that, by a tacit agreement, the members of his family left him severely alone. Ordinarily, this would have offended him deeply, but now he took no notice, and seemed quite content in his isolation. This was construed as a bad symptom.

"Another penny on the income-tax," conjectured Herbert.

"Eggs gone up." This was Hugh's suggestion.

"I don't believe he's well," said Lizzie.

"I hope it's nothing to do with Len," was Julia's anxiety.

"I'm afraid John's got into trouble," sighed Mrs. Porlick to herself. And she was right.

It was on Saturday that the cloud was first noticed. On Sunday Mr. Porlick walked out of church the moment the Benediction was pronounced, and in the evening he actually stayed at home—a most unusual proceeding. Lizzie heard him walking up and down his room for more than

an hour, but when she limped to his study door and knocked, he called out "Go away!" in such a savage tone that she durst try nothing more. On Wednesday, the housemaid gave notice, and Mrs. Porlick wept surreptitiously all through dinner. On Thursday the cloud burst in storm.

For this time it was no trifle such as sometimes sent Mr. Porlick into a fit of ill-temper. It was a trouble that would have struck to the earth many a better man.

At five minutes to seven on Thursday evening Herbert, who had commenced his initiation into the business, came in alone.

"Where is your father?" asked Mrs. Porlick, as soon as he entered the drawing-room.

"He said he might be half an hour late."

"Did you ask him whether we should wait?"

"Yes; but he only grunted like an angry bear."

"Julia, my dear," said Mrs. Porlick, "will you go down and tell cook to keep dinner back till half-past."

But half-past seven struck, and there was no sign of the master; a quarter to eight, and then the hour.

"What *can* it be?" said Mrs. Porlick, anxiously. "I never knew such a thing happen before. I really think we had better have dinner up. I'm afraid he'll be vexed either way."

"Then, for goodness' sake, let's have a bite," said Herbert.

"Yes," added Hugh. "A row on an empty stomach is a little too much."

Mrs. Porlick compromised, and a quarter-

past found the family gathered round the dining-table.

Just as the first helping had gone round, the latch-key sounded and the hall door was slammed to with emphasis.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Porlick, "I'm afraid he's annoyed." Then, with an expression of surprise, she added, "Why, I do believe he's brought some one home with him. And we've only got hash! Who can it be?"

As she finished speaking, the door was flung open. There was a pause, during which all eyes attempted the impossible task of seeing round a corner. Then—

"Go in, sir; lead the way. Every one will be delighted to see you."

It was Mr. Porlick's voice, but pitched in a key that made it sound unnatural and horrible.

The next moment, John shambled into the room, and stood by the sideboard as if half dazed, a squalid deplorable object.

He was ghastly pale; his eyes, when he raised them, looked heavy and red-rimmed. His dress was untidy and his head hung down.

Mrs. Porlick sprang to her feet, but catching sight of her husband's face as he turned it towards her, stood as if petrified.

It was his face, to be sure, but strangely altered. He always was inclined to be florid; now his complexion was almost purple. The skin seemed tight-drawn, and the eyes unusually prominent. But the strangest thing about his countenance was the smile that lit, or rather shadowed it. It was a hard, cruel smile, which gave him a sinister and almost inhuman expression.

"Sit down, Amy," he said, and his voice suddenly became suave, but not more natural than before: only a shade more terrifying.

"Here's our eldest son come back from abroad," he went on, sitting down at the head of the table; "quite an unexpected pleasure, isn't it? Why don't you make room for your brother? Any one would think you were not glad to see him."

No one spoke a word. In the pause, the only sounds were a whimper from the mother and a little answering sob from the sofa. Ordinarily this last would instantly have arrested Mr. Porlick's attention. Now he took not the least notice.

Ellen, whose place was at her father's right hand, drew away, nearer to Herbert, who was next her on the other side.

Suddenly Mr. Porlick turned round to the miserable figure still standing by the sideboard and called roughly, pointing to the vacant place—

"Sit there!"

Like some frightened animal, John came to heel, and dropped into a chair.

"Ring the bell, one of you," said his father, resuming his horrible affectation of suavity; "you were evidently not expecting to see your brother."

When the servant came, he said—

"Knife and fork for Mr. John."

The wretched John had to make a pretence of eating; Mr. Porlick, on the other hand, making an excellent meal. No one spoke a word.

At length the cheese was taken away. Mr. Porlick folded his napkin very deliberately, wiped some crumbs carefully from the cloth with one hand into the other, and deposited them on his

plate. Then he leaned forward, resting his arms on the table.

"Now then," he began, reverting to his usual tone—when things had gone very wrong—"we'll have a family talk."

This time, at any rate, there was no nervousness or hesitation, and—even in his wrath—he noted the fact with satisfaction.

"This"—he paused for a moment, and then hurried on—"this fellow, here, has disgraced me—and all of you. He ought to be in prison now, and would have been if I had done my duty."

At this, Mrs. Porlick broke down and began to cry without any attempt at concealment. Her husband either did not hear or, at any rate, took no notice. He went on, his speech gathering momentum as he spoke.

"You all know what advantages he's had. An expensive school—you would have him sent to Marshalls"—this was fired at his wife—"then two years abroad—think of it! Then with me at Baker Street—there was a chance!"—here Mr. Porlick did not forget to look at Herbert. "And, when he showed himself a duffer there, another first-rate chance in Berlin. Why, he might have done anything over there. With the capital I could have put behind him, he might have struck out—fed us, and fed himself too. And what does he do? Why, he squanders his money in filthy debauchery and then robs his employers. Yes, robs them like any dirty little office boy that sneaks the stamps. Faugh! it turns my stomach! A common vulgar thief—that's your son and your eldest brother. That's *my* son—my son that came of age. Yes, you remember that great speech of his—he was going

to be worthy of his father. Ah! Any one could see he was a fool; but a thief, an embezzler, a debauchee."

"Oh, don't, Josiah! I can't bear it!" cried Mrs. Porlick, now sobbing loudly, and pressing one hand on her heart. "I'm sure he's sorry, aren't you, John?"

"Sorry!" echoed her husband, scornfully; "of course he is. Did you ever know a thief who wasn't sorry when he was caught? What good does that do? I've worked and fought and made my way, and there's never been a blot upon my name. I've never owed a man a penny. I've sued half a dozen men to get my just dues; but no man has ever dared to sue me. There's not a business name that stands higher in London to-day than mine, and I've done it all myself, with God's help, of course, and without so much as a white lie. And I've always been a straight liver since I was a lad. I hate all wicked ways, and if any of my flesh and blood choose to walk in them they may walk alone. I will have neither part nor lot with them. Now, here's my eldest son—I say to all you younger ones, look at me, and look at him, and see for yourselves what comes of doing right, and what comes of doing wrong."

Mr. Porlick paused for breath. The contrast was indeed striking. The father, in spite of his anger, so evidently prosperous, and strong, and self-satisfied; the son, a pitiful, shrunken object, ill to look upon. He kept his eyes held down; but every now and again he cast a stealthy glance round the table, and once when his eye rested on his mother a tear rolled down his cheek.

"Now, I've made up my mind what I will do,"

went on Mr. Porlick, turning to his son. "I have to think of myself and the rest of us; and, to save our name from any more disgrace, I shall not give you up to justice. But you have cut yourself off from my family, and henceforth I refuse to acknowledge you. I will give you a hundred pounds, and I will pay your fare either to Australia or America. More than that, I will remit another hundred pounds twelve months hence. After that, I will have nothing more to do with you. Of course, I shall take your name out of my will."

There was another pause, and then Mr. Porlick remembered something he had forgotten to say.

"These payments will be made to you on one condition only,—that you give up the use of the name on which you have brought shame and disgrace. Now then, do you accept the money and the terms? No beating about the bush, yes or no?"

"Yes," mumbled John.

"Then here is your cheque," said Mr. Porlick, tossing over the piece of paper with a contemptuous gesture, "and there are plenty of witnesses. Now"—taking out his watch—"it is a quarter to nine. We will have prayers at once, and then you will go and look out anything you wish to take with you, and bring it down into the hall for me to see. Then you can have a cab and take them away with you."

"Oh, Josiah!" pleaded Mrs. Porlick through her tears, "you won't send him away to-night. Let him sleep at home to-night."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," answered her husband, wrathfully. "No thief shall sleep under my roof, if I know it. Ring the bell for prayers."

Ellen obeyed, and the servants came in, the housemaid laying the big Bible in front of Mr. Porlick. She, and the cook, and the charwoman (specially bound under her agreement to attend family prayers morning and evening) all looked curiously at the shrinking figure. There were two markers always kept in the book—one for morning, the other for evening prayers. Mr. Porlick solemnly adjusted his glasses, opened the New Testament end, and felt for the page indicated by the marker. In his loud, rasping voice he announced the chapter—"St. Luke's Gospel chapter xv." Then he stopped. The pause lasted so long that every eye was raised and fixed upon him. With a sudden movement he shut the Bible, and pushed it from him.

"*He's* upset me too much," he said, laying heavy stress on the first word; "I shan't take prayers to-night."

"Oh, father dear," said the voice from the sofa, where Lizzie sat with her pocket Bible open, "do read it."

"Hold your tongue," he answered roughly. "Here, Martin, take the Bible away. And you" —turning to John—"go and do what I told you, at once."



BOOK III

I

annot be truthfully said that the repudiation banishment of his eldest son affected Mr. Por- s appetite by day or his sleep o' nights. He very keenly the disgrace brought upon his ıe. He was stung too by what was to him the ost intolerable thought of failure. It could ' be, he felt, some unnatural wickedness, some ıstrous perversion of nature's order, that could e given to him, Josiah Porlick, for son and heir, ief, a wanton, and, worst of all, a fool. But, on other hand, he felt that he had acted with a mptitude and decision worthy of himself. The ertion of lawful authority, the execution of ice even on one's own flesh and blood, the lication of the great laws of right and wrong, this appealed to such narrow imagination as possessed, and exalted him in his own eyes. ides this, there was the positive pleasure— haps the greatest he knew—derived from the rcise of power. Finally there was the secret confidential whisper of his unsleeping com- rcial instinct telling him that at a loss of only hundred and fifty pounds (for John's defalca- ıs were on a very small scale) he had "cut" ad bargain very cheaply. He shuddered at thought of what might have happened to the siness in the hands of such a partner.

On Mrs. Porlick the blow fell far more heavily. With the divine persistency of motherhood, she fastened on a few incidents, and utterances spread, unhappily, over many years, and forgetting much, and excusing what she could not forget, fashioned for herself the image of an ideal son over whose exile she mourned with constant but fruitless tears. One result soon showed itself. Since the strange seizure for which Lizzie had called in the doctor, she had had two slight attacks of a similar nature, but in each case she had been able to avoid any publicity. One night, however, about a couple of months after John's banishment, the house was roused at midnight by Mr. Porlick, who, knocking violently at the door of Hugh's room, bade him get up and hurry out for Dr. Burnyat. When the boy came down he found his father half-dressed, and with a strange scared expression on his face. He spoke, too, with a most unusual quietness and self-restraint, as if, Hugh thought, he were overawed.

"As quick as you can, Hugh," he said; "I'm afraid your mother's very bad. I can't imagine what it can be. Tell the doctor it's very urgent —*very* urgent, mind you say."

And, opening the hall door, he half pushed him out.

It was some time before Dr. Burnyat arrived, and then the immediate danger was over. At the time of the first attack, he had given Ellen some small capsules to be used in any such emergency. Fortunately, she had heard her father rouse Hugh, and, hurrying down, had carried out the doctor's instructions. The acute pain and the difficulty of breathing that had so alarmed Mr. Porlick, were both relieved, but the exhaustion that followed was



serious enough. And before he left, Dr. Burnyat impressed on Mr. Porlick's mind the fact that his wife was in the grip of one of the most mysterious and intractable of diseases. Nor did he forget, on a subsequent visit, to assure Lizzie that her affectionate artifice had in all probability saved her mother's life.

For Lizzie herself the situation was a complex one. Like her sister, she was a blend of the two sides of the family. From the Porlicks she inherited a strong will and excellent abilities, especially mathematical; from the mother's side an affectionate, clinging disposition, and a sweet evenness of temper, that seemed only to ripen and mellow in the shadow of weakness and pain. She sympathized with her mother in her grief over the prodigal, and shed many tears, and offered many prayers on her own account. For this was another feature of the invalid child's character, and whence derived, it would be hard to say, though the discipline of the sofa may have helped its development. She was unmistakably born for a religious life. Bright and full of fun, there was about her nothing of the ascetic. But any appeal to the spiritual side of her nature she found irresistible. She turned her smiling face towards it, as the flower moves towards the light. In some mysterious way she could assimilate and draw nourishment for her soul from the most arid and barren ground. Family prayers, which to the others (excepting, perhaps, Mrs. Porlick) loomed as a severe infliction, were to her a real means of grace. Already she had begun to exercise a strong though unobtrusive influence upon the rest of the family. Her gallant bearing during her fits of pain, her unselfishness and

generosity, and her outspoken repentance for any little outbursts of temper, all these qualities not only endeared her to the others, but seemed to evoke in them echoes and reflections. Julia, for instance, sturdily as she disliked her uncle, could never find it in her heart to disparage him in Lizzie's presence. And, indeed, she was obliged to admit that he never showed to so much advantage as in his relations with his invalid child. Occasionally he was rough and mean even with her; but, on the other hand, he sometimes showed a touch of fatherly tenderness and a real and thoughtful kindness that astonished his keen-eyed niece. Still, it was long before she could believe that the child's love for her father was quite genuine or her ideal presentment of him a real and honest self-deception. Time and the closest observation reassured her as to both these points.

II

WHY, Albert, you're the very man I wanted to eet!" exclaimed Mr. Porlick, heartily, as he ught sight of young Cartwright in the stream of turning passengers one August evening. "Is our good father at home?"

"Yes, I believe so," answered the other, shaking ands.

"And is he quite well—and Mrs. Cartwright, oo?"

"Perfectly well, thank you."

"Ah, that's a thing to be thankful for, and yet ve seldom remember it until we're ill. Shore was aying that only the other Sunday—quite true. I vish he were always as sound."

"Why, is Mr. Shore among the heretics?"

"Well, between ourselves, I'm not satisfied. I've a great respect for him in many ways. For a parson he's one of the best business men I know; not that that's saying very much. But he lets himself talk very wildly sometimes, you'd think he was a Socialist. You know what I mean, housing of the poor, and that sort of rubbish. I say, stick to your last. Preaching the gospel's your business, not politics. But he's not so bad as that curate of his—Reddy. *He's* three parts a Socinian. Downright dishonest, I call it, taking the Church's bread

and butter and subverting her teaching. I'm not going to put up with it any longer."

"But St. Luke's won't suit you any better, will it? I hear they are extremely high."

"Oh, absolute Papists! I'd sooner die than give them a penny. No, I've been seriously thinking of taking some sittings in the Congregational Chapel. I'd like to know what your father thinks of Mr. Clayton. I hear he's got a fine congregation."

"My father likes him very much personally, but I fancy he thinks him rather advanced in his theology."

"Ah, the same story everywhere, I suppose. But it's just a fashion. It'll die out, and the grand old Gospel will stand forth as it used to do. I should like to have a word or two with your father."

"He'll be delighted to see you," said Albert. "Won't you come in to dinner?"

"No, my boy, I won't do that, but I'll look in afterwards."

Accordingly about eight o'clock, Mr. Porlick walked out of one gate and in at another. He found Mr. and Mrs. Cartwright with Albert, sitting out on the lawn, sipping black coffee, the father and son smoking.

"Very comfortable you look," he exclaimed, as he lay back in a big deck-chair after shaking hands; "I often wish I could afford to live an idle life."

"That's rather severe, isn't it?" asked Mrs. Cartwright, a comely woman of five and forty or thereabouts, with a merry eye.

"Not at all," said Mr. Porlick; "your good husband has earned his leisure. I'm still in the thick of my work, and sometimes I get tired of it."

"Ah!" sighed Mr. Cartwright, "work is a blessed

thing—especially the Master's. Those were my happiest days; I can't help wishing they could come over again."

He was a portly man, with an excellent presence, and a face almost leonine in its outline, marred only by heavy lips and a weak, fat chin.

"You do quite enough now, my dear," said Mrs. Cartwright; "look at your correspondence. Then you are constantly being asked to speak at meetings and preach at anniversaries. Besides, there's the Orphanage."

"Yes," acknowledged her husband with another sigh, "I suppose it's about as much as I can do now; but it seems a poor day's work."

"I've told you before, haven't I," Mr. Porlick remarked, "that I used to go and hear you when I first came to London? Fine congregation you had too. I've been a Churchman all my life, but I've never been bigoted. Just now I feel very much drawn towards nonconformity."

"Indeed," said Mr. Cartwright; "that's very interesting. I should like to know, if it's not impertinent, what has brought about the change?"

"Well," answered Mr. Porlick, leaning back in his chair and half closing his eyes, "it isn't any one thing alone, it's a combination. I'm not satisfied with Shore. He's not what I consider sound; but Reddy, his senior curate, is far worse. He's practically a Socinian, and his manners are very objectionable."

"Ah!" said the minister, shaking his head, "it's a sad thing when men begin to cut their moorings. Sometimes, when I hear some of our younger brethren, I can't help saying to myself, 'What would good old Angell James have said to that?'"

"So you're tarred with the same brush as the Church of England, eh?"

"Well, you know what young men are, Mr. Porlick."

"I do, sir—to my cost," said Mr. Porlick, his face clouding heavily.

"I mean intellectually," added the other, hastily; "spiritual conceit is a great temptation of youth. A young man at college reads some of this higher criticism as they call it. 'Hulloa!' he says, 'here's something new; it must be true.' It never occurs to him that older men have been through the same experience before he was born. Ah well, thank God, we most of us grow old some day!"

"Yes, but a good many never grow wise. Shore, now, is old enough to know better. What sort of a man have you got at your chapel?"

"Mr. Clayton is a very excellent young man indeed, and a preacher of considerable ability. Of course I belong to another generation, and measure things by a different standard. But he attracts a large congregation."

"Do they pay their way?"

"A very practical question," said Albert, with a smile.

"Certainly," assented Mr. Porlick; "I'm a practical man, and I believe in a practical religion that keeps its balance on the right side. I've seen a good deal of 'struggling causes,' and I know what they mean—cadging or roguery. No, honest religion is like any other good thing—it's got to be paid for, and every church and chapel ought first of all to be on a sound business basis. Otherwise, the sooner it's sold up the better."

Mr. Porlick spoke with some warmth. Albert



smoked in silence, and his father did the same. He had no sympathy with their visitor's views, but neither had he any love of argument. Mrs. Cartwright came to the rescue with an inquiry about Mrs. Porlick's health, and a description of the benefit she had herself derived from the Droitwich Baths, and at five minutes to nine the visitor rose and said good night.

"What is that Orphanage Mrs. Cartwright mentioned?" he said, as he shook hands.

"Oh, it's quite a small affair—a sort of cottage home at Hampstead. It was started by some of my old people, and had got into low water. I've been trying to put it on a firm footing again. It's done a lot of good work in its time. I'll send you a report."

"Thank you," said Mr. Porlick; "I should like to see it."

III

WHILE Mr. Porlick was still wavering in his allegiance to what he called "the church of his fathers," the curate preached a sermon which stiffened his hesitation into decision. The text was the great paradox, "I am come not to bring peace but a sword." "Christianity," said the preacher, "has been very unfortunate in its supporters. Kings and potentates have constantly looked upon the Church of Christ as a kind of reserve police force, useful to keep in check the forces of revolt, and therefore to be encouraged and liberally patronized. But over and over again they have been dismayed to find their guards in open insurrection. To change the metaphor, they have looked on Christianity as the mortar, useful to bind together the stones that form their palace walls, but instead they have found it the most acrid solvent the world has known, and wherever it has been introduced, great fissures open in the stonework."

Now, the attitude of mind at which the curate scoffed was in reality exactly that in which Mr. Porlick approached the problems of religion. Religion was to him the great bulwark of property, and hence obviously divine. And to hear this sacred truth denounced, and even derided, was more than he could bear. It was only his constant

fear of ridicule that kept him in his place till the end of the service, and at supper he announced his determination.

"I've done with Shore," he declared; "I've stood that young fool of a Reddy a good deal too long. Next Sunday we go to the Congregational Chapel."

His family recognized the tone, and there was no discussion. Indeed, to most of them it was not a matter of great moment. The exception was Mrs. Porlick, who was sincerely attached both to the liturgy and to the vicar. She, however, recognized the uselessness of opposing her husband in this mood, and said not a word.

That night, when Mr. Porlick retired to his study after prayers, he felt on excellent terms with himself. It was a relief to have done with hesitation—a frame of mind which always harassed him. Of course it was something of a wrench to leave the Church of England, but this, he told himself, was a sacrifice to principle from which he ought not to shrink. Besides, he felt sure the vicar would be considerably astonished. He had hitherto looked on Mr. Porlick's protests as mere bluff. Now, when it was too late, he would see them in their true light. Probably—at any rate, he hoped so—Reddy would get a rap over the knuckles; the loss in subscriptions would surely bring that about. As this thought occurred to him he rose and stood in front of the fire, smiling to himself and jingling the money in his pockets.

Then a new idea struck him, and, sitting down again, he opened a drawer in his pedestal table, and from the orderly contents selected two small

account-books. From these he jotted down on an old envelope various items, which he afterwards added up.

"Yes," he muttered, "it's been growing; time some limit was reached. One hundred and twenty pounds a year—too much—there's moderation in all things. It'll pinch the Association, I know. Eighty pounds a year they've had out of me. They won't find it so easy to make that up, I know—fools!"

Then he leaned back and became absorbed in calculations. If he took a pew in the Congregational chapel he could hardly pay less than ten pounds or twelve pounds a year. Then subscriptions to various agencies would mean another five pounds. The whole thing could be done for twenty pounds, including offertories, for the children gave out of their pocket-money, and he always made a point of seeing that they did give. At first, at any rate, he would save twenty pounds by the change, without reckoning what went to the Missionary Society. As to this he had a scruple or a superstition. Each time he had largely increased his subscription, a great business success had seemed to reward his liberality. The last occasion had been most striking. He had raised his subscription to the round eighty pounds on a Sunday. On the Monday he bought Eries at twenty, against his stockbroker's advice. That very week they began to rise, and a month or two later he sold at thirty-two, just in time to dodge a heavy fall. It was a clear providence.

This money, therefore, or a considerable proportion of it, was ear-marked for religious uses. Of course at first he would not give the whole to a new object; Providence could not expect or approve

such imprudence. And it was a delightful reflection that, for a few years, at any rate, he would be insured on high at an appreciably lower figure.

Having reached this comfortable conclusion, he replaced the books and locked the drawer. Then, acting on a sudden impulse, he opened another drawer, and taking out a packet neatly endorsed "Letters Unanswered," pulled one out and spread it before him. It was from a correspondent who signed himself John Gold, and it bore the Toronto post-mark.

Mr. Porlick read it over, muttering his comments as he went along.

"'I see my folly now, when it is too late' (*Yes, a good deal too late*); 'but I am doing my best to wipe out the past' (*Rubbish! there's no doing that*). 'There have been a good many things against me' (*Same old whine*). 'My chest is weak, and we have already had some cold winds that have tried me a great deal' (*I suppose that's put in for your mother: only she won't see it*). 'I have got several odd jobs, but regular work is not easy to get' (*It never is, for fools and weaklings*), 'and I have been obliged to live upon my capital' (*Of course!*). 'They tell me it will be easier to find a post next spring. I had an excellent chance of joining a man in a farm about ten miles out, but I should have had to put in at least five thousand dollars' (*Ah! begging again*). 'He seemed to take a fancy to me' (*Fool!*), 'and said he would keep the offer open for six weeks, but of course it's no good thinking of it. I should be glad to be out of town life. I am sure the country would be the making of me, physically and morally, too' (*Pah!*). 'Please let me know when

you will send the other hundred you promised. Living is very dear out here, and money seems to go much faster than at home. If I have to give up the idea of farming I think I can get a decent chance by paying a premium, for which the hundred will come in very handy' (*Dare say it will, when you get it*).

"'Yours sorrowfully but sincerely' (*Stuff!*),

"'JOHN GOLD.'"

With a final snort of contempt, Mr. Porlick replaced this letter and locked the drawer.

IV

ʀʟɪᴄᴋ was not allowed to leave All Saints' efforts to retain him. Mr. Shore called, lid the curate. They both, however, found ırishioner so atrociously rude that they .ve up the attempt at conciliation. The the matter was, he suspected them of ng his motives, and a mutinous, though f-articulate, whisper in his usually well-ed conscience told him they were right. urally irritated him and fully accounted for rity of his manner.

transfer to the chapel took place at once. yton was a man still well under forty, an t preacher as well as a capable organizer. lick was honestly pleased, and after the service he applied for a pew. Nor did it amiss when he found that a whole pew ɔt be obtained immediately. It was a sign ɔerity that he noted at once. Moreover, gratified by the evident satisfaction with is application was received. "Sharp fellow ıcon, or whatever they call him," he said ɛlf, as he walked home; "knew money when it. Quite right too. I don't blame him. no passport like it, all the world over—that racter, of course."

For Mr. Porlick generally spoke to himself in much the same language as he used to other people.

The only member of the family who felt the change from church to chapel at all acutely was Mrs. Porlick. Early associations were very dear to her, and she sadly missed the familiar phrases of her beloved liturgy. Moreover, she was really attached to the vicar, and was distressed at the breach of a long-standing friendship.

Lizzie, too, was sorry, but her regret was not so much on her own account—though she missed the vicar's visits—as from sympathy with her mother. Herbert and Hugh deplored the extra ten minutes which Mr. Clayton demanded for his sermon. Except for this, they were indifferent. On the other hand, Ellen and her cousin appreciated the change. Mr. Clayton was one of the new school, an Oxford man, a fair scholar, and well-read in modern literature. Sometimes the girls felt that his sermon was almost as good as an Extension lecture. Ellen had learned to look upon evangelical views as old-fashioned, and was secretly reading Huxley, Tyndall, and Darwin. Julia, for the present, dutifully followed her. They were excellent friends, and Ellen was as pleased to teach as Julia was to learn. They were both gifted with unusual ability, and there were in their characters many kindred traits. Ellen, of course, had been better taught, or, at any rate, had been through a wider curriculum; but Julia was quick, as well as persevering, and made rapid progress. In spite of her uncle's prohibition, she bought a shorthand manual, and the two girls studied it together. As it happened, Mr. Clayton had in his younger days

been for a short time a reporter, and was able to help them over some of the earlier stiles. Then he soon became their literary oracle, and shunted them from Huxley to Drummond. He had written one or two books that were conspicuous in the windows of the local booksellers, and he also had a column in the *Weekly Congregationalist*, which was now regularly taken in at Goldcroft. He had an easy, authoritative way of passing judgment on contemporary reputations that fascinated the girls. Gradually they began to listen to his religious utterances with more interest and deference than Mr. Shore had ever been able to command. And at last they laid down their arms and surrendered at discretion. They would not have admitted it; but, to all intents and purposes, the Congregational Manse became their Vatican, and the Rev. Nicholas Clayton their Pontiff.

Mr. Porlick immediately dropped all the subscriptions he had been giving in connection with All Saints'. It was his rule, he declared, to support to the extent of his means those agencies which were connected with the place of worship he regularly attended. Nor was this a mere excuse. Within a fortnight after he paid his first pew rent, he had procured and studied the Chapel Year-book, and had determined the amount of his subscription to each institution. Only when he came to the London Missionary Society did he hesitate. It would, he felt, be only natural to transfer to it the sum he had been in the habit of contributing to the sister society; but he was afraid of missionary societies. He dreaded their ventures of faith and the drawing-room meetings that followed. Besides, he told himself, as a

steward of the riches committed to him, it was not just to support one particular form of Christian activity so much more largely than another. For years he had given an undue proportion to foreign missions: it was time to redress the balance.

He soon fixed on the new object of his munificence. The Hampstead Orphanage of which Mr. Cartwright had spoken had, through the ex-minister's influence, been partially adopted by the Ealing church. The house, it appeared, was dilapidated, and would need structural repairs; there was an earnest appeal for new or additional subscriptions. He acted promptly, sending a cheque for thirty pounds to Mr. Cartwright, who was the Treasurer. The natural result, which he had foreseen, speedily followed. He was invited to join the Committee, and accepted the invitation. To his first meeting he came, loud and brusque, primed with information, and fresh from a visit just paid to the Orphanage. The chief matter for consideration was the estimate for repairs. As a rule, affairs of this nature had been left in the hands of the Secretary, Miss Fallstaff, a lady of mature years and comfortable means, with an almost pathetic confidence in her own business capacities. Upon her and her estimates, Mr. Porlick fell, tooth and nail, cross-examining her as to drains and other unpleasant details, with a minuteness and pertinacity that not only exposed her ignorance, but reduced her to the verge of tears. Fortunately for her, Mr. Cartwright was in the chair, and managed to cover her retreat to a certain extent. But, before the members dispersed, Mr. Porlick suggested another meeting as the estimates were "quite ridiculous," and "full

of childish blunders." The worst of it was, as the members and the unhappy secretary soon found out, that the new subscriber was almost invariably correct in his figures and facts.

"All the same, my dear," said Miss Fallstaff to Mrs. Loomes, the matron, a few days afterwards, "I shall certainly resign. I've never been treated so in my life before. Any one would think, to hear him, that I was his hired servant."

"Even if one were," replied Mrs. Loomes, who, in fact, was in receipt of a salary, "I do not see that the acceptance of emoluments ought to subject one to such behaviour. I can assure you, his conduct, when he came the other day, was quite ungentlemanly. He several times answered me in the rudest way, before the children, too. *'Nonsense; that's not what I asked you.' 'Can't you answer a plain question?' 'What's the woman talking about?'* The way he went poking about all over the place, I have never seen equalled. I assure you, he ferreted about in cupboards and places I have never opened myself. As for the cook, I thought she'd have had a fit when he insisted on having the meat weighed and asked to see the entry in the housekeeping books. If this is going to be the new way of management, they'll have to get a new housekeeper."

"Well," said the secretary, "I must admit I was a little taken aback on Wednesday; next time I shall be prepared, and he shall have a piece of my mind."

V

DURING the time of John's disgrace and Mrs. Porlick's illness which followed it, Julia refrained from speaking to her uncle with reference to Len and his future. But, when her aunt had rallied, and Mr. Porlick seemed to have resumed his usual manner, she determined to take action. Indeed, she felt she had no choice left in the matter. The office drudgery had become so wearisome to the young fellow, that he told her, in a tone which she recognized as meaning business, that he was not going to endure it much longer.

"Look here, Ju," he said, one Sunday afternoon, when they were having a talk in the garden at Goldcroft, "I've had just about as much of it as I can stand. I don't want you to do my dirty work for me. I'd have spoken to uncle about it long ago, if I'd had my way. I know I shall make a fool of myself—I funk him, and that's the plain truth. But I'd sooner do it than grub along taking down his stupid letters. It's got to come, sooner or later. I was made for something better than tapping the knobs of a Remington. Look at this; I didn't mean to show you yet."

As he spoke, he pulled out of his pocket a paper, and, opening it, pointed to a paragraph marked with a blue line down the margin. Julia



glanced at the heading of the page, and saw that it was *The Musical Herald* and that the page itself was filled with notices of new music. Looking more closely at the marked paragraph, she read—

"'*Reverie, by Adolf Wangel.*

"'A simple, but effective piece. Herr Wangel is evidently a musician, though we do not remember to have met with his name before. The melody is fresh and pleasing. We should not be surprised to find this a very popular piece with players of moderate technique.'

"Well," said Julia, looking at her brother with a puzzled air, "I don't understand. I don't know this man Wangel, do I?"

Then, seeing the smile on his face, she added, hastily—

"It isn't *you*, is it, Len?"

"Well, yes, it is, if you ask so point-blank," he replied, still smiling.

"Whatever do you take such an outlandish name for?" she asked.

"Oh, that was Vincent's idea—you know, my friend at Charlotte Street. A German name gives one a better chance in the musical world, he said."

"Did they pay you for it?" inquired practical Julia.

"Not they; but, of course, if it sells——"

"Did you have to pay them?"

"Not I." And he rattled his pocket to show her how little it held.

"Then, how was it published?" she went on, a little impatiently.

"Ah, you must ask me something easier. All

I know is, Vincent got a young firm he's had something to do with, to take it. I think I'm to square up at Christmas, but they're sure to sell enough to meet that. They've done pretty well already."

"Oh, Len, I wish you wouldn't be so happy-go-lucky."

"It's the artistic temperament, my dear," said Len, with great content. His vocabulary was widening with the circle of his acquaintance.

The result of this afternoon's conversation was that, as usual, Julia undertook to bell the cat. To do Len justice, he was quite ready to take his own part, but gave way to her insistence, gracefully enough.

"Try to make him see that it's good biz when you once get a start. A song's as good as a bolt, tell him," was his parting advice.

One of the changes which followed Mr. Porlick's quarrel with the Established Church was that he gave up his Sunday-school work. It is true that he was, during the week, a very hard worker, one to whom a day of rest might well come as a relief. But then he loved work, and all he asked when overdone, was some one to act as a lightning conductor for his irritability. It was pleasant to him to be at the head of any organized work. The exercise of power and the arrangement of detail were the joys of his heart, and to a certain, though, of course, limited extent, he found opportunity for both in the Sunday school. Moreover, the sense of the value of continuity was strong in him. He despised fickleness, and he took pride in numbering the years of his unbroken religious service.

Now, however, that the step had been taken,

he found an unexpected compensation in his quiet Sunday afternoon. This was one of the things he had dreaded, for he never knew what to do with a leisure hour. His first idea was to read the Bible through, with the assistance of Matthew Henry. Before he had read a couple of pages, he laid the book open on the table, and began to think. Not for any consideration would he have glanced at a secular balance-sheet or account-book on that sacred day, but his conscience made no protest against mere thoughts, and he spent a delightful hour in surveying his empire "from China to Peru." He soon recognized that the quiet hour so spent was as profitable as it was enjoyable. He could, as it were, mark time, and consider what the next movement should be. He had once seen a distinguished chess player conducting a dozen simultaneous games against as many opponents. He had watched with interest the little, dark, keen-eyed foreigner sauntering round the tables, hands behind him, a cigarette in his mouth, stopping a couple of minutes before one opponent, only pausing before another board to slide a piece along the squares, and finally checkmating ten out of the dozen. The incident often recurred to his mind as an allegory; he was the victorious player, and the Baker Street business, the Newdigate bolt, the houses, the stock, and all his other assets were the chess-boards round which he made his pilgrimage of success. His various interests and possessions were becoming so large and numerous that he sometimes felt there was a danger—even for him—in the multiplicity of items. Now, once a week, at least, he would bring them all into focus, and view his estate as a whole. And he would do this,

he told himself, on the Sabbath day with a special view to seeing that his religious and philanthropic offerings were adequate and regular.

So steady and persistent was the growth of his fortune, so unvarying the success of his many enterprises, that this weekly retrospect usually left him in quite a genial frame of mind. Indeed, it soon came to be a maxim of prudence with his family that if he had to be asked for anything, Sunday tea-time was the most auspicious occasion. Hence it was just as the tea-things were being cleared away, the Sunday after Len's visit, that Julia asked for and obtained an interview.

"Uncle," she began, as soon as they were alone in the study, "I know you don't like beating about the bush. I want to speak to you about Len."

Mr. Porlick's face clouded.

"What about him?" he asked roughly; "and why can't he do his own business himself?"

"He wanted to speak to you himself," she replied; "but I got him to let me. I'm afraid he'll never settle down to business."

"Indeed; and how does he propose to make a living?"

"He thinks he can keep himself by his music. You know he really is very clever at it. Mother sent him to a musical institute at Manchester, and his teacher there said he had wonderful talent. He's just had a piece of music published, and some of the musical papers are praising it very much. He's trying to get one or two songs taken—a successful song is a very good property."

Mr. Porlick made no reply. Julia could see by the expression of his face which she had learned

to study as if it were a weather-glass, that he was engaged in some process of calculation. She went on—

"He feels miserable because he knows he is not giving you satisfaction"—here Mr. Porlick trumpeted a snort—"and his thoughts are always wandering to music."

Evidently Mr. Porlick had finished his calculations. He got up and stood before the fireplace.

"Now, look here, Julia"—to her astonishment, he spoke quite quietly, one might almost say kindly—"I don't blame you at all for taking your brother's part, though I don't think much of him for crawling behind your petticoats. But, as you say, I don't believe in beating about the bush, and when you ask me a plain question, you'll always get a plain answer whether you like the taste of it or not. If Len wants to leave me, let him leave. I can do very nicely without him, tell him, but you must both of you understand this—once out, out for good. I'll have no dilly-dallying. I've never yet taken back any servant—man, woman, boy, or girl—who's left me, and, please God, I never will. They have their chance, and if they choose to throw it in the gutter, I don't pick it up and clean it and ask them if they'll kindly take it again. No; out they go, and I wash my hands of them. It'll be no loss, for lately he hasn't been earning his wages, and he drives me half mad with his humming and drumming and strumming. But, if he goes, I've no more responsibility for him. He's no more my nephew than that"—here Mr. Porlick stopped for a moment, and then went on—"is my son."

"But, uncle," urged the girl, encouraged by the calmness and moderation of his manner, "don't you

really think that, from a business point of view, it may be the wisest thing for him to do? If he had a couple of years' regular training, he would be almost certain to get on. If the worst came to the worst, he could teach and earn a living that way."

"And how's he to get the two years' training?" asked Mr. Porlick, with a sneer. "Does he propose that I should pay for it?"

"He didn't say a word about it, but if you would, it would be the making of him, and I don't believe you would lose a penny in the long run."

"I'm sure it's very kind of you to advise me as to my investments," began her uncle, with laboured sarcasm and a heightened colour. Then, suddenly resuming his former tone, he went on, "Now, Julia, I said I'd give you a plain answer, and here it is. I won't waste a single penny on any such wild-cat scheme. If you like to have your relatives strolling vagabonds, I don't. Bohemians, they call them. I know well enough what will happen to Len in Bohemia. He'll drink the waters, and you know what that means."

There was a significance in his tone that made Julia flush angrily. Before she could say anything, Mr. Porlick resumed—

"No, that's final. Not a penny if he leaves Baker Street—there's some one waiting now to step into his shoes if he's fool enough to shuffle out of them. All the same, I'm afraid it's true that he'll never make a man of business. He's too fickle and too flighty, and he's no head for figures."

Angry as she was, Julia could not help smiling.

Instantly her uncle snapped out, "What are you laughing at?" in his most savage tone. His fear of ridicule was sleepless.

"I was only thinking how he used to hate learning his tables," she answered; and his face cleared.

"Just so," he said; "it's a bad sign when a boy doesn't like figures. Now, *you* never found any difficulty with them, I'll be bound."

"No, I rather liked them," she admitted.

"Now, look here, Julia," he began again, "I've said what I have to say about Len, and that chapter's finished. I'll tell him myself to-morrow. But there's something I want to say about yourself. I'm quite satisfied with the way you have behaved since you came to my house."

"Thank you, uncle," she said, with lifted head and a note of pride in her voice.

"You came as a sort of companion to Lizzie, and you have made yourself useful in many ways. But Lizzie hardly needs a companion now; she's getting a big girl, and if she were not fussed over so much, I believe she would soon get about, as well as you or I. So, to a certain extent, your occupation's gone."

He paused, as if to let the announcement make its full impression.

"I will look out for work at once," she said.

"I don't think you will," he replied, "unless you're as mad as that brother of yours. I promised to look after you, if you behaved yourself, and I just told you I am satisfied with your behaviour. That being so, I shall keep my promise. You have heard me speak of the Hampstead Orphanage. The secretary at present is that ridiculous old woman, Miss Fallstaff. She is what they call a voluntary worker, which is all very well, but she is such an incapable fool that, as long as she is in office, the thing will never work properly. I mean to take

the thing in hand and run it on a proper business basis. At the next committee meeting I shall propose that we have a paid secretary at a salary of forty pounds to commence with, with a percentage on any increase in the income. I shall submit your name as a candidate, and I shall offer to pay your salary myself for the first year in addition to my ordinary subscription. You will still live here; you will be engaged in religious work. You are evidently fitted to have to do with children, though of course your principal work will be organizing and looking after the finances, and instead of twenty pounds a year, you will be making forty pounds, and whatever besides you manage to get."

Julia looked at him searchingly. Much as she disliked him, the offer seemed a good one, and she felt as though she ought to show the gratitude she knew he was waiting for.

"Thank you, uncle," she said at length; "it is very good of you to think of me, but I have had no experience of such work."

"Oh, I'll show you what to do, and how to do it," he answered carelessly. "I shouldn't put you in the place if you were not fit for it."

VI

One result of this interview was a long letter written the same evening, in which Julia delivered to her brother Mr. Porlick's ultimatum, and urged him to go on with the distasteful work, at any rate for a time. The good advice, however, fell on barren soil. His friend Vincent had procured for him the offer of a berth in the publishing office of the *Augur*. The "salary" offered was only twenty-five shillings a week, which was less than he was getting at Baker Street, but he was to have the opportunity of writing some of the musical and dramatic criticisms, for which he was to be paid. He was tolerably ready with his pen, and with Vincent to help him, he felt quite equal to the work. Consequently, when on the Monday his uncle opened fire, Len was quite ready with his decision. Driven into a corner, he showed a firmness and self-possession at which Mr. Porlick was secretly surprised. He expressed his gratitude to his uncle for having taken him into the business, and his regret that he couldn't do the work so as to give satisfaction.

"I'm very sorry, uncle, but it's no good. I'm not built for business, and I should only make a mess of it, and vex and disappoint you even more than I have done already."

"Pooh!" cried Mr. Porlick, who was in his most uncompromising, dictatorial mood. "I know what these miserable excuses mean. You've made up your mind to go to the devil, that's the long and short of it. Well, you must take your own course; only remember, it's your last chance. I never give a second. If you slam the door it won't open again. Now, then, what do you say?"

"I'm sorry to vex you, sir, but I think I had better go."

As a matter of fact it suited Mr. Porlick's plans that Len should go; but he disliked losing his grip on the boy, and the implied slight to him as head of the business and arbiter of Len's fate stung him.

"Very well, then, go, and the sooner the better. I don't want any discontented Bohemians loafing about. Here"—he scribbled a few words on a sheet of paper—"you can draw your week's money and leave at once."

"I'd rather stop and earn it, if I may," said Len, with imperturbable good humour. "The machine wants a thorough overhauling, and there's nobody else here who can do it decently."

This was true, and Mr. Porlick knew it. He had also regretted his words of dismissal as soon as they were uttered. He might just as well have his money's worth out of the lad.

"Very well," he said, "I won't turn you out, as I meant to, but remember, at the end of the week off you go for good."

"I hope so," said Len, smiling.

"Don't be insolent, bandying words with me. What are you going to do when you do leave?"

"I think I can get a place in a newspaper office."

"In what capacity?"

"As a clerk."

"What's the paper?"

"The *Augur*, it's called," said Len, with a slight hesitation, which Mr. Porlick instantly noticed.

"What sort of a paper is that?" he asked. "I don't know the name."

"It's a musical and theatrical paper," answered Len, thinking it better to leave out any mention of sport.

"Ah, just what I feared," ejaculated Mr. Porlick. "Well, don't forget that I warned you. Have nothing to do with disreputable rags of that kind. You've cut yourself off from here, but, for your mother's sake, I'll try to get you some respectable work, if you give me your solemn promise that you'll stick to it and give up this wicked nonsense about music and the theatre, and worse things to come, I have no doubt."

Len shook his head.

"I've promised——" he began.

"Oh, you have, have you! So you didn't think it worth while even to listen to what I might have to say, after all I've done for the pair of you. That's a pretty slap in the face. Thank God, there's other blood in you than mine. There, that's enough; I don't want to have any more to say or do with you."

"You didn't let me finish——"

"No, and I won't—insolent young cub!" exclaimed Mr. Porlick, stamping his foot and smiting his table-bell as if it were the offender's face.

The effect of all these changes may be thus summed up. The eighty-five pounds hitherto paid to Len were now given to Herbert Porlick, who thus

took his elder brother's old position, though at a much lower salary. Julia was practically provided for, and though her uncle paid her salary for the first year, she would be entitled, after that, to look to the Orphanage committee. Even if he continued his special contribution, he would still be spending on philanthropy at least thirty pounds less than when he was treasurer of the Missionary Society Association, to say nothing of the twenty pounds saved on Julia's salary. Altogether, the arrangements were admirable, and he recognized in them not merely his own genius for organization, but also—quite distinctly—the finger of Providence.



VII

Master as he was in his own household, even Mr. Porlick was not in reality quite so absolute as he fancied himself. Things occurred during his absence which, had he known of them, would have grievously surprised him. The really remarkable circumstance was that the transgressors were sometimes those who most readily and uncomplainingly acknowledged his supremacy. It was, for instance, his wife and his youngest child who welcomed and encouraged the visits of Mrs. Beckton, distasteful as they knew her presence would be to the lord of the household. They said to one another that he had never really known her, that being away from home all day it was natural for him to look upon her simply as a governess, while they who were grown into intimate relations with her from morning to night had come to look upon her with affection.

There was another tie that united them. Though she knew he had been dismissed in order that John might step into his shoes, Beckton had always felt for his unfortunate successor, and had kept up a correspondence with him in Germany and since his exile. Now he became the sole intermediary between him and his mother and sisters. The ex-governess generally brought a closely written

epistle from Canada, and took back with her, elaborate messages which she wrote out at home. In this way Mrs. Porlick kept the letter of the promise not to write to her son which Mr. Porlick had extorted from her, while she certainly violated its spirit.

A few days after Mr. Porlick's interview with Len, Mrs. Beckton happened to pay one of her periodical visits. As a privileged guest she was taken at once into the dining-room, where Mrs. Porlick and Julia were sitting with Lizzie.

After the first greetings, Mrs. Beckton took out a letter and handed it to Mrs. Porlick.

"It isn't very cheerful reading, I'm afraid," she said, "but he meant you to see it. Frank thinks he writes in a manlier tone than he used to."

"Poor John," sighed his mother, as she put on her spectacles and unfolded the letter.

"How is the housekeeping?" asked Lizzie, for the young wife had a keen sense of humour, and made great fun out of her own inexperience and its results.

"Oh, we're improving. We do most of our shopping together now, on Saturday evenings, so that if anything turns out wrong, we're both to blame."

"And does the drawing-room still smell new?"

"Not so bad as it did. We had a fire one night, just to see how it looked, and the chimney smoked so that Frank wanted to bring our geraniums in and leave them there. He said it would kill the green fly. Since then the French-polishy smell has quite gone off. Besides, one of my pupils drenches herself with wood violet, so *that* enters into the competition."

"Is she the girl with no voice?"

"You mustn't call her that, now. I've found her voice at last, and I'm coaxing it out. It's very shy, but it's coming. I've got two new piano pupils through her, so I won't have her laughed at."

"You haven't got your paying guest yet, have you?"

"No; I wish we had. We should be in the lap of luxury then. There's such a jolly little room waiting for her, if she could only see it. There's a lovely view from the window."

"Chimney pots?" asked Julia, with a smile.

"No, indeed! Trees—green trees. Regent's Park—the Broad Walk, Frank says."

"I hope Mr. Beckton is doing well, Winifred," said Mrs. Porlick, looking up from her letter. "I do so wish Mr. Porlick had never quarrelled with him."

"I think he's getting on very well; but it's hard work. Still, his partner has been very kind. He's an old man, and he says he doesn't mean to keep on much longer, and then Frank may make the best he can of the business. If he had a little more capital, I believe he could make a good thing of it."

"I wish I could lend him my money," said Lizzie. "Did you hear that I had a fortune left me? Father's not the only capitalist in the family."

"What do you mean, Liz?" asked Mrs. Beckton.

"It's quite true," said Julia, "some old aunt died a month or two back, and left a heap of money to this young woman."

"A thousand pounds, free of duty," said Lizzie, proudly.

"Hark at the business woman," cried her old governess, stroking her hand. "Well, I'm sure

you'll make a good use of it. Frank's got an old aunt, too, rolling in money; but she isn't one of the giving sort. When his father failed, she wouldn't hold out a finger. Frank says all her money will go to a home for respectable cats, or else to the Chancellor of the Exchequer as conscience-money. He says she's been dodging the income-tax for twenty years."

"My fortune is all tied up with trustees, and I mustn't anticipate it, whatever that means, and if I marry—Oh, such a rigmarole. But I'm to have some of it for pocket-money, and I earn some from father, so I really am very rich. I'm going to help keep a child at Julia's Orphanage."

"Julia's Orphanage?" asked Mrs. Beckton, looking puzzled.

"Oh, of course; I forgot. It's such a time since you were here, you haven't heard that's she's a full-blown secretary now."

And there followed a full description of the move from church, and of the Hampstead Orphanage.

"Father's promised to take me there some day when he goes to make one of his visits. If I'm tired, I'm to sleep there. I rather fancy I shall be tired."

By this time Mrs. Porlick had finished her letter, and, calling the visitor to her side, entered into a long conversation with her. Julia was arranging some Orphanage correspondence, and Lizzie, silent and with half-closed eyes, was thinking. Suddenly she pulled Julia's dress.

"Ju," she whispered, "draw your chair more this way. I want to say something."

Julia did as she was requested.

"Didn't you say Len was leaving his lodgings?"

"Yes, next week, I think."

"Has he got any new ones?"

"Not that I know of. He hadn't when I heard rom him last."

"Then why shouldn't he go and live with Vinifred?"

Julia thought for a moment or two, and then nodded.

"It's a capital idea," she said; "I wonder I didn't think of it myself. It would be just the very thing, if it isn't too expensive. Music and all. How shall we find out?"

"Why, ask her, of course," said Lizzie, with a laugh.

"Please, teacher," she went on, addressing Mrs. Beckton, "I want to ask a question."

"What is it?"

"What do you expect to get for the window with the view?"

"Do you want to take it yourself? I'm afraid it's not grand enough for such a millionairess."

"No; but I—we—really want to know, don't we, Ju?—as a matter of business."

"Oh, I see—as a matter of business! Well, for a lady boarder in to all meals we should ask twenty-five shillings a week."

"And for a gentleman out all day?"

"Ah, but they eat more—well, we might do it for twenty-three shillings, if he were thin and didn't want to smoke in the drawing-room."

"Then, why shouldn't Len take it?" cried Liz. "It cost him as much as that in Charlotte Street, didn't it, Ju?"

They all discussed the matter at some length, and finally Julia promised to write to her brother at once.

Only Mrs. Porlick shook her head, doubtfully.

"It does seem a good plan, and I should be so glad for you to let that room, my dear," she said to the visitor; "but I'm afraid Mr. Porlick would be upset, if he knew we had been arranging it."

"He wouldn't, if he knew everything," said Lizzie, stoutly, falling back on her usual line of defence. "It's half-knowing that makes people say things."

Neither Julia nor Mrs. Beckton felt much confidence in this theory, but neither of them felt called upon to challenge it.



VIII

nspiracy was successful, and Len moved
ıder possessions from Charlotte Street to
Crescent, and entered upon the delightful
:t of Regent's Park tree-tops. Fortunately,
s, for the conspirators, Mr. Porlick was so
in his behaviour during the last week that
.d him to his face he would put up with it
;er, and left on the Thursday, forfeiting his
money, a circumstance which afforded his
o little satisfaction. This abrupt severance
· relations saved Len any cross-examination
is future address. At dinner that evening
rlick solemnly excommunicated the culprit
.bsence, and declared he would thenceforth
mention his name himself, nor suffer it to
tioned in his presence.

it happened, Julia was out that evening.
h her secretarial work she was beginning
e friends, and had, since her appointment,
l several invitations. Her absence on this
ar evening was not unwelcome to Mr.

His feelings towards her were of a
r character. The memory of his sister, in
perhaps partly because—of the way in
ıe had treated her, still exerted a powerful
:e over him. It might not determine his

action, but it constantly asserted itself as a factor to be reckoned with. Julia's startling likeness to her mother would, of itself, have ensured her special consideration at his hands. But, besides this, he recognized the girl's power, and, as he observed the impression she made on other people, his respect, or—as he would have called it—his affection for her increased. On the other hand, Lizzie's devotion to her had irked him, and a watchful jealousy had borne witness to his strong affection for his invalid daughter. Now that his niece was forming outside friendships and engagements, he would no longer be annoyed by her constant association with Lizzie. As usual, he told himself, things were working round to harmonize with his wishes.

Another result of the change in Julia's circumstances was seen in a gradual but distinct alteration in her relations with her cousin Ellen. Hitherto she had been the scholar and Ellen the teacher. In many respects they were curiously alike. But there was in Julia an imaginative strain, the existence of which she herself had never suspected. In comparison with Len she had always looked upon herself as the embodiment of cool, hard common sense. Ellen's superiority in the routine work of the schoolroom had tended to strengthen this impression, or, at any rate, to check any development that might have shaken it. Just as she had begun to feel that she was overtaking her teacher, she found herself set free from her influence and called upon to strike out for herself. One shrewd observer had noted the difference between the girls even before the change of circumstance. Mr. Clayton had discovered in Julia at once quicker sympathies and a more original

nd adventurous intelligence. He read the signs vith growing admiration, and yet with a sigh, for ıe knew that courage is a hard taskmaster. He had ıtood on the fringe of the desert himself, and he oresaw that for her there would be no turning back. The awful fear of loneliness which had appalled him would never, he felt sure, deter her. His own doubts he had put to flight, or, at any rate, silenced, by setting active religious work in the forefront of his life. His was an emotional nature, and his quick and happy gift of utterance had often as powerful a sway over himself as over his crowded congregations. He was neither weak nor insincere. No duty, however painful, of his high calling did he ever shirk. Indeed, though he sometimes shrank from the death-bed and the piteous extremities of human sorrow, he yet knew well that it was from these sad experiences he drew the virtue that renewed his faith. Apart from them he sometimes felt as though he would have been driven to the terrible choice between practical hypocrisy and isolation. He was delighted, therefore, when he found that Julia had taken up the work of the Orphanage. Perhaps his joy was not entirely disinterested. He was, himself, on the committee, and he looked forward with eager anticipation to the joy of frequent meetings.

As for the work itself, the committee soon had reason to congratulate themselves on the change from a voluntary to a paid secretary. Acting at first on Mr. Porlick's suggestions, she collected the subscription lists of kindred charities and wrote to the contributors. She made a friend of the matron, but kept a keen eye on the details of administration in the orphanage. She wrote to all

the clergy and ministers within a radius of half a dozen miles, and pressed them for offertories. She called on the well-to-do members of Mr. Clayton's congregation and placed before them the needs of the Orphanage. In short, within six months she had substantially increased the income and had suggested a score of small improvements in the domestic details of the work. Her uncle accepted these symptons of success as one more indication that Providence was as usual fighting on his behalf. It was perfectly natural, but not on that account any the less gratifying.

IX

inge from church to chapel had yet another ience, and it was one which was not unfore- y Mr. Porlick. His daughter Ellen and Cartwright were thrown more than ever h other's society. It was now more than ind a half since the young man had asked nission to speak to Ellen. Acting on the ncouragement he received from the father, ddressed to the daughter most businesslike motional proposals which she had received vered in a like spirit. She had no wish to he told him, and though she liked and re- him as a friend, she was not prepared to further. It was by no means a decisive ı, and Albert did not allow it to interfere ; health or with the frequency of his visits croft. Mr. Porlick comforted him with the ce that he considered his prospects most ng.

vell-brought-up girl always shows a certain y reserve when the question of marriage is y put in front of her. As a father, I would e it otherwise. Depend upon it, my boy, llen does make up her mind, it is for once . There is no more dilly-dallying about that ı there is—thank God—about her father."

To Ellen, herself, he used rather different language, pointing out the danger of falling between two or more stools, reminding her of the uncertainty of human life, and magnifying the advantages of a separate establishment.

Ellen, however, was a very level-headed young woman. She fully intended to marry, and she was equally determined to marry "well," by which she meant securing a straightforward, honourable man and a comfortable income. Albert Cartwright she looked upon as a fairly satisfactory candidate, and though she did not feel inclined to surrender at the first invitation, she was quite prepared to consider —after a decent interval—a second. The entrance upon the scene of Mr. Clayton introduced a new element. For the first time she experienced towards a stranger a feeling stronger than mere liking or respect, a feeling which not only surprised her by its strength, but disturbed and even alarmed her by the suggestion it seemed to carry with it, of increase and development. For the first time, too, she felt the pangs of jealousy, a weakness upon which she had been severe both at home and at school as not only wrong but silly. For she was clear-sighted enough to see that the minister was more attracted by her cousin than by herself. For a time she made a fight—without malice, be it said —till she recognized that Mr. Clayton's preference was distinct and decisive. Then she rallied her admirable common sense, and fought another battle —this time with herself. She was really fond of Julia, and she determined that their friendship should suffer no interruption. If Mr. Clayton had not the best possible taste in womankind, that, she told herself a little grimly, was his misfortune, not



ılia's fault. And after all, there were serious ·awbacks in the life of a minister's wife. The come was not so very comfortable as compared ith that of, say, a prosperous solicitor. Then one ıd to be at the beck and call of the congregation. esides, a minister's own position was always ıther precarious. No; after all, probably things ·ere best as they were.

Again Mr. Porlick felt inclined to compliment rovidence on the excellent arrangements by which is own prudent schemes seemed to be antici- ated. Once or twice he had felt a little uneasy at ıdications he fancied he could detect of a growing ıterest in his elder daughter on the part of Mr. layton. He had met the difficulty in his own way y inviting the young minister to dinner, and ıring a private conversation afterwards, mention- ıg casually that he didn't believe in fathers who ad made a little money, surrendering their control f it on the marriage of their daughters.

"I may be right, or I may be wrong," he declared, but I regard capital as a trust which a man has no ght to relinquish while he is capable of managing is affairs. As long as God spares my life, I look pon it that He commissions me to put my talents) the usurers, and that, as any business man knows, ıeans husbanding all one's resources with the tmost care."

Later on, when the minister's attentions to Julia ecame unmistakable, her uncle was delighted.

"Sensible young fellow that," he said to himself; took my hint, and is acting upon it. He's welcome) Julia—an admirable arrangement. What a bless- ıg for the girl that I could give her a home!"

X

DURING the autumn and early winter, Mrs. Porl was manifestly failing. Manifestly, that is to sa to every one except her husband. To him she h become so much a part of his establishment th he could no more contemplate the possibility - her being removed by death than he could imagine his dining-room table being distrained upon for rent. The annual visit to Swanage only seemed to exhaust her slender stock of strength and leave her more nervous and prostrate than before. Even Mr. Porlick could not help noticing her indisposition, which he attributed to lack of exercise in the open air and irregularities of diet. He had recently purchased the recipe of an American patent food—Brain-bran was its euphonious name —and was hard at work manufacturing and advertising it. The extravagance and the unwholesomeness of immoderate meat-eating was now one of his favourite themes, and Brain-bran had become a standing dish on the Goldcroft table. As for "Julia's orphans," as Mr. Porlick facetiously called them when in a sprightly humour, they had ample opportunity for judging the merits of the new "nerve and muscle maker." He sent them a hundred tins free, and undertook to supply them for a year with fifty tins a month at ten per cent.

less than the store price. He then sent a scientific expert to weigh the children before and after feeding with Brain-bran, and his most satisfactory report was duly printed with an almanac, an index to the streets of London, and other useful information in a neat little book, called "The Seven Ages for Brain-bran," tens of thousands of which were then sent out by post and hand, every one of them, as Mr. Porlick remarked to his family, helping to make known, not only the new food, but the orphanage as well. It was one of his trials that Mrs. Porlick obstinately refused to acknowledge the merits of the preparation. She did, indeed, in what her husband called a grudging and half-hearted way, admit that the flavour was "not bad," but after eating it, her fancies and prejudices were such as to produce the symptoms of severe indigestion. Dr. Burnyat had ordered her Brand, and Valentine, and Benger, all which Mr. Porlick pronounced hopelessly out of date; but when, to please him, she gave these up, she had the bad taste to show at once an alarming weakness that even he was obliged to recognize. The open-air treatment proved still more disastrous. Being pursued by a threatening cloud when some little distance from home, Mr. Porlick (apprehensive of damage to his silk hat) hurried her along at such a pace that on reaching the house she collapsed in the severest attack of angina she had yet experienced. This time Mr. Porlick was seriously alarmed, and raised no objection to the calling in of a medical man, though as soon as he came, Mr. Porlick, in silent but gloomy protest, went out, and remained on the sea front till he had gone. His report, delivered by Ellen, was very unfavourable. Mrs. Porlick, the

doctor said, was in a very serious condition indeed, and he advised that as soon as she had in some degree rallied from the acute attack, she should be taken home so as to be under the care of her own medical man. He not only reinstated Brand and Valentine, but peremptorily ordered wine. Under this treatment the patient so far recovered that a fortnight after the attack she was brought back to Ealing.

There for a little while she enjoyed the Indian summer of her life. Treated by her husband with a consideration that seemed to her positive tenderness, and by every one else with demonstrative affection, she reaped the harvest of her many years of affectionate drudgery. At any rate, she had won her children's love. Even Herbert, who most nearly resembled his father, seemed in her room to shake off the likeness.

At first the doctor recommended drives. Mr. Porlick listened with cold displeasure, for it seemed to him a perfectly useless extravagance; but when he found that no demand was made upon his purse, he was well content to make no inquiries. He heard remarks which told him that the drives took place, and he guessed easily enough that Lizzie paid. "Let the child have the satisfaction," he said to himself; "she'd very likely waste the money in some sillier way." He insisted, indeed, on her banking the greater part of the income from her legacy, but he allowed her to dispose of the sums he paid her for the excellent work she now regularly did for him. She was so quick, so accurate, and so reliable, that he was beginning to trust her with matters which he had hitherto kept rigidly to himself.

As the weather grew colder, the drives were abandoned, and Mrs. Porlick's weakness increased rapidly. She was soon confined to her room, and then to her bed. Neither medicine nor diet had any effect. As the doctor said to himself, her time had come. Only Mr. Porlick refused to believe it. He was proud of his habit of looking facts in the face, but he sometimes did it with his eyes fast shut. To the rest of the family the illness was a sacrament—to all except Julia, their first. She had already tasted the bread of sorrow, and shared the wine of sympathy. But the light of the sick-room was Lizzie. She and her mother had always been good friends. Now they could not bear to be out of one another's sight. She sat on the bed by her mother or on the sofa at her feet the whole day. No one but Lizzie could choose the right passages from the Bible and the right hymns, and whatever Lizzie chose was right. Yet her father was shocked by her demeanour. When at last he was compelled to admit to himself that there was real danger—not even to himself would he say of what—he brought to the sick-room a face that appreciably added to the gloom. But Lizzie sat there, smiling, radiant, her eyes perhaps a little too bright, but her voice clear as a bell. "Heartless!" would have been her father's censure on any one but his favourite child; even as it was, he was vexed and troubled, and took her to task one day when they happened to be alone, after dinner.

"I can't think how you can sit in your mother's room smiling as if there were no such thing as illness. It doesn't look well. I wonder she doesn't notice it. Any one would think you were not sorry to see her so ill."

"Oh, father," she cried, "you know I am most dreadfully sorry, and of course mother knows it too. But there *is* a bright side to it too."

"Oh, is there?" he asked; "I should like to know where?"

Lizzie made no reply, and after waiting a minute or so, her father returned to the attack.

"Where is the brightness—eh?"

Lizzie flushed scarlet, began to speak, stopped abruptly, then forced the words out of her lips.

"Heaven is a great deal better than earth, isn't it?"

"Oh yes, no doubt—of course—that's quite right. I didn't know what you were driving at. Still, I don't like to see a child smiling when her mother is lying ill. It's open to misconstruction."

"But, father dear," persisted Lizzie, "is it wrong not to dislike the idea of death? It seems so beautiful. Just to go to sleep when you're tired out, and then to wake up in heaven. I'm sure mother's looking forward to it. Sometimes when I read to her she gives me such a smile. I know what she means, and I can't help smiling back."

"Well, I don't understand it—it's a womanish, hysterical way of looking at it. These things are a great mystery—St. Paul says so, and I don't pretend to be wiser than the apostle. Of course there are hopes and consolations and so forth, that's what the gospel is for; but"—here Mr. Porlick paused, then added, with a strange, almost savage vehemence—"I hate the sight of wet clay!" and with a shudder hurried out of the room.

That same evening, or rather in the early hours of the next morning, Mr. Porlick was roused by the

summons that he had long been secretly dreading. As he came out of the spare room where he was sleeping, he noticed that the gas on the landing was full on, and stopped to turn it down. It annoyed him to see night turned into day in this irregular and extravagant way. When he entered the front bedroom he found all the family assembled, Ellen stooping over her mother; Lizzie, as usual, on the bed, holding one of her hands; Julia and Herbert a little in the background.

Julia came forward to meet him.

"Aunt has had another attack; Hugh has gone for the doctor; he said he was to be fetched whenever it came on. She has just been asking for you."

Something told Mr. Porlick that this was the end. His irritation died away—awe, with black wing, began to spread over his soul.

"She wants me, do you say?" he asked in a husky voice.

"Yes, she wants to speak to you alone."

As she spoke, Ellen looked up.

"Mother is better now. She says she must speak to you alone. We shall be outside. If you touch this bell we will come instantly."

Julia helped Lizzie from the bed, and they all filed out of the room on tiptoe, leaving Mr. Porlick alone with his wife.

As she lay there, with the marks of imminent death plainly stamped upon her face, he stepped with heavy, creaking tread to her side.

She had a strange, intent look, that arrested his attention, and roused him out of the torpor of misery in which he had felt himself sinking. It flashed across his mind with a sense of injury that she did not smile at him as she did at Lizzie.

"Josiah!"

Her voice sounded strange.

"Yes, my dear."

"Have I been a good wife to you? have I kept the promises I made when you married me?"

Mr. Porlick on principle hated making general admissions, and he was beginning cautiously—

"On the whole—" when a feeling of something like shame surprised him, and he also remembered that they were quite alone.

"There is no need, my dear, to ask such questions," he said. Then, as she shook her head feebly, he added, "Of course you have."

She made an effort to rise, but sank back and pointed to the pillow. He understood that she wanted it raised, and, supporting her with one arm, he propped it up with the other. While he was thus engaged she stroked the hand that held her, with a gesture half timid, half loving. Then she began again—

"I have tried to be an obedient wife."

"Yes, indeed you have." He knew it was true, and the thought touched him sharply, bringing the tears to his eyes.

"I am going to leave you very soon."

"No, no," he exclaimed, "the doctor will be here in a minute, and he'll pull you round."

She shook her head.

"No, this is the end—for the present. There's one thing on my mind—don't frown, Josiah."

"I wasn't frowning," he said half guiltily. "What is it?"

His ordinary voice was reasserting itself. He knew what was coming.

"John!"

And she looked up at him with a wistful entreaty.

His eyes met hers, and they understood one another. A tear rolled down her cheek.

"It would have made me so happy," she gasped.

He shook his head.

Again she raised her eyes to his, but now she seemed to be looking far past him.

"I must tell him," she murmured, as if she were scarcely conscious of his presence. "In one thing I did disobey——"

"Eh?" cried Mr. Porlick, in his natural sharp explosive tone. He spoke so loudly that the door was gently opened an inch or two, then quickly closed again.

"I—I—altered—my——" Her voice died away.

"Not your will?" As he asked this question he stooped over her, and his voice and face were both heavy with anger.

But her eyes had closed, and her head had fallen gently on one side. For the moment he thought she was dead, and rang the bell loudly.

Immediately the room seemed full. Dr. Burnyat hurried to the bedside, and Mr. Porlick drew back into the shadow. His mind was busy with his wife's will. He might have guessed and prevented this. Under her marriage settlement she had power to appoint a sum of five thousand pounds, and he knew that by her will she had appointed the income to him for life and the capital equally between their children. All kinds of horrible possibilities rose in his mind. She might, she probably had, cut down his life interest in favour of the miserable John. Good Heavens! she might have appointed the

whole sum to him. The very idea was intolerable. He walked up to the doctor and touched his arm.

"Will she come to?" he asked.

Something in his voice and manner repelled the doctor, with whom he had never been a favourite.

"I can't say," he answered coldly, "how far she may recover consciousness, but the end is very near."

They were almost the words she had used herself a moment before, and they were hardly uttered before she opened her eyes. With still, awestruck faces they stood watching the solemn moment of departure. Even Mr. Porlick, with his terrible doubts and fears knocking against his lips, durst not let a syllable escape. Even Lizzie, yearning for one more glance and smile to carry in her memory, could not beg them by so much as a look, for there had dawned upon the homely and familiar features that strange, unforgettable expression, unlike any other, which says, even to the nearest and the dearest, "*What have I to do with thee?*" Then the light went out of the upward-gazing eyes, and Hugh broke into a passion of tears.

XI

THE death of Mrs. Porlick, though it made but little difference in the routine of life at Goldcroft, had many and, some of them, far-reaching consequences. Mr. Porlick's worst fears with regard to the will were not justified. The only alteration that had been made was that the testatrix had appointed one thousand pounds to John absolutely. The income of the remainder went, as before, to her husband for life, and on his death the capital was to be divided amongst the five children, so that John would share in this distribution also. The thought of John having one thousand pounds to play ducks and drakes with was gall and wormwood to Mr. Porlick, but there was no help for it.

In one respect the long illness favoured Mr. Porlick's plans. Mr. Clayton frequently paid pastoral visits, so that he and Julia were now constantly meeting, while Albert fell into the habit of coming in almost every evening to make inquiries. Gradually but surely he strengthened his position in the family, and when—some three months after Mrs. Porlick's death—he repeated the momentous question, Ellen accepted his offer quietly, but graciously enough.

To Mr. Porlick the loss of his wife had been a grief, but, still more, a shock. This was to him

the sting of death—that it filled him with a dreadful, irrepressible feeling of instability and insecurity. Though he had, of course, no doubt whatever that he was in the narrow way that leads to another and a better world, yet deep within his heart—far deeper than his creed—there lay a secret misgiving that no other life would suit him quite so well as this of which he had made so splendid a success. To feel his roots spreading far and wide, and taking their firm, tenacious hold upon the solid earth, that was his happiness. When the cold and pitiless wind that sweeps across the valley of the shadow blew upon him and tore away a branch, he felt as though the roots were tearing too, and all his strength went from him.

It was fortunate for him that in the very hour of his depression he was called upon to fight a legal battle in defence of his beloved "Brain-bran." Some unscrupulous imitator suddenly put upon the market a tin covered with what was in colour and design almost a replica of Mr. Porlick's label. The name of this imitation was "Bone-bran," and it was largely advertised. The moment it was brought to his notice, Mr. Porlick rushed off to his lawyer, and at the earliest possible moment an injunction was sought. Up to a certain point, Bone-bran made a very pretty fight, but collapsed for lack of money before the trial of the action. Now, there was nothing quite so delightful to Mr. Porlick as to engage in a struggle in which the odds were heavily on his side. To trample on a prostrate enemy was the one form of exercise that seemed to invigorate his body as well as refresh his spirit. He pressed home his advantage with a relentless vehemence and pertinacity that at last became

distasteful even to his solicitor. The battle cost him something, it is true, notwithstanding his victory, but not more than a few weeks out of town, and it did him far more good.

He had yet another, and many people would consider it a more legitimate source of gratification. Lizzie's health had been for some time improving, but so gradually that her own family were slow to recognize the progress. When, however, she insisted on taking her place at the dinner-table, and walked in the garden with no more support than Julia's arm, her father was delighted.

"I knew it all along," he declared; "there was nothing wrong but a little nervous derangement—I used to suffer from it myself when I was young. Ah, if I'd only insisted on having my own way you'd never have spent all these years on your back. I declare, when I think of those butchers, it makes me sick—positively sick; two hundred and fifty pounds, and all for nothing—for a great deal worse than nothing. If your poor mother hadn't been so fidgety——"

There he stopped. He could not forgive his wife that one act of disobedience which had wiped out the memory of all her long years of submission. It irritated him to think that this poor, weak, helpless creature had actually, as he expressed it to himself, "bested" him on her death-bed. She had compelled him to an unwonted tenderness and consideration, she had even wrung from him a far too generous character—for he had since remembered some acts of insubordination, and suspected many more—and only after he had, as it were, paid the price, and committed himself in words, had she owned to her default. She had flouted him to

some purpose, too. If there had been a shadow of a chance, he would have contested her appointment; but his lawyer had advised him that he would incur odium and, what was still worse, expense—and all to no purpose.

But, though he could not forgive, he could fear. His dread of death extended, in some degree, to those whom death had taken. In some mysterious way that he could not explain to himself, he felt as though his wife now held him at a disadvantage. His sense of superiority had been very pleasant to him. It was an uncomfortable thought that now, perhaps, she knew too much, and saw too clearly.

Still, on the whole, things might have been worse. He had won the battle of Brain-bran; he had practically settled the future of his elder daughter and his niece. Lizzie would soon be well enough to take Ellen's place, and as for the wretched John, his thousand pounds would probably only be a weight to drag him a little lower down.



BOOK IV



I

LEN was married early in April, less than four nths after her mother's death. She herself uld rather have deferred it, but Mr. Porlick isted. Indeed, he was more pressing than the degroom. He was anxious to see his plans ually and irrevocably carried out, and it had o occurred to him that a wedding following so rd upon a funeral must necessarily be quiet, ıple, and inexpensive. So he declared that it s the truest respect to Mrs. Porlick's memory complete a family arrangement on which, he d, her heart had been set.

Albert had taken a house about ten minutes' lk from Goldcroft, and Mr. Porlick, as his dding-gift, provided the furniture. Without ng into details, it may be said comprehensively t there was in that house hardly a single article t was not a wonderful bargain, and that the ole cost Mr. Porlick less than two-thirds of its alogue price. Fortunately for the young couple, ›ert's Liverpool relations supplemented his gift h articles that neither were bargains nor looked : them. The presence of these wealthy Liver- ›l magnates really accounted for Mr. Porlick's prising meekness on this occasion, though consoled himself afterwards, and restored his

self-esteem by calculations which satisfied him that he could buy up the whole Harding connection "stock and lock."

From another point of view, the wedding was a disappointment to Mr. Porlick. It had occurred to him that it would be an auspicious as well as economical arrangement, and calculated, he added, to give Mrs. Porlick double satisfaction, to have two marriages at once, but here he had to acknowledge failure. The worst of it was he could not even feel sure who was to blame. There were times when he felt inclined to challenge the minister, and ask him point-blank why he didn't propose to the girl. He was restrained, however, by the respect he always entertained for success. If Mr. Clayton had been a student or a curate, Mr. Porlick would have had him, so to speak, by the throat long before; but the popular minister of a crowded chapel, with an income of seven hundred pounds a year, was not to be so summarily treated.

Moreover, he was puzzled by Julia's behaviour in the matter; nor, upon this occasion, did he derive any assistance from his recollections of his sister. That the girl was "in love" with Mr. Clayton he felt certain, and he was equally sure that the feeling was reciprocated. Yet not only did the minister make no sign, but Julia frequently made what Mr. Porlick felt sure were only excuses to avoid going to chapel, and over and over again refused opportunities most thoughtfully and delicately put in her way by her affectionate uncle. He might, of course, have spoken plainly to her—indeed, he felt it was his duty to do so; but—in his own fashion—he was fond of her, and he had

onsiderable respect for her abilities, and some or her temper. In this difficulty he bethought imself of Lizzie, who was no longer a child. n her shrewdness and good sense he had great aith. Now that she seemed to be really out-rowing her weakness, and could move about the ouse without help, she was becoming more than ver his companion. During his wife's illness e had had a somewhat severe attack of influenza, vhich had really given him a great fright—for the eeling of languor and exhaustion was a most lisagreeable novelty. Hence, staunch teetotaller hough he had always been, he had taken like a amb Dr. Burnyat's advice to add a couple of glasses of Burgundy to his dinner, and to have a lrop of whisky and hot water just before bedtime. t had come to be a regular institution for Lizzie, ince she had been able to move about more freely, o look in upon him on her way to bed, and—if he elt inclined for it—mix his glass for him. If he vanted a little talk with her, he generally took his 'medicine," making a wry face over it.

"A pretty thing," he said one night, as he held ut his hand for the steaming glass, "for a lifelong eetotaller to come to, but the responsibility rests n Burnyat. Bah! it's foul stuff. How any one an make a beast of himself for the sake of it, asses my comprehension. Sit down, child, I want word with you."

Lizzie sat down willingly, wondering whether it vas to be the servants, or business, or the Orphan-ge. She had interest and to spare for any or all.

"What do you take to be the real state of affairs etween Julia and Mr. Clayton?" he asked.

Lizzie was surprised, and she showed it.

"I believe they are not indifferent to each other —isn't that the correct way of putting it?" she answered, with a smile.

He nodded his head.

"It's been so for some time, hasn't it?"

"I think so."

"Then why in the world don't they settle the thing? They're neither of them babies. Have you any idea why they hang about like this? Have they had any tiffs—lovers' quarrels—any silliness of that kind, eh?"

She shook her head.

"Julia wouldn't tell if they had. She's proud, and she would think it his secret as well."

"Oh, that's all rubbish!" interjected Mr. Porlick.

"But I don't fancy it's anything like that," went on Liz.

"Then you think it's something else. Come, Lizzie, you know I'm fond of Julia, and it's for her sake I feel anxious. What is the difficulty?"

Lizzie was silent for a moment. Then she said, speaking slowly and with hesitation—

"I don't know, but I think—I think she doesn't consider herself fit to be a minister's wife."

"Eh—what? Stuff and nonsense!" ejaculated Mr. Porlick, who had a very poor opinion of humility when it interfered with his plans. "Of course her father wasn't much to be proud of, and her brother's a young vagabond; but, after all, she's my niece, and I should hope that's good enough for any minister in the country."

"But I didn't mean in that way. She reads a lot, and she's very clever, and thinks things out for herself, and I'm afraid she's troubled with doubts."

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Mr. Porlick, with an air of great relief; "I was afraid it was something serious. You're a clever little witch yourself. Good night, child."

And he offered his cheek for the good-night kiss.

"Father dear," said Lizzie, lingering a moment, "you won't tell Ju what I have just said, will you? I wouldn't have said it to any one else."

"No, no," he declared heartily, "I'll take care of that. I'll be the soul of discretion."

But Lizzie still looked doubtful and almost unhappy as she limped upstairs to bed.

II

Mr. Porlick's discretion took the form of contriving another opportunity for the reticent lovers to meet. As it happened, the monthly committee meeting of the Orphanage was just due. These meetings were usually held at Mr. Cartwright's, and he was, as a rule, voted into the chair. Besides him, the treasurer, and the secretary, there were only three regular attendants and two irregulars. The regulars were Mr. Clayton; the secretary of his church, a Mr. Filliter, commonly reported to be "something" rather important in the Civil Service; and the late secretary, who had been asked to join the committee as a sort of consolation prize, after she had been forced to resign the secretariat. The irregulars were a retired schoolmaster named Bastock, and a local tradesman, Mr. Hucknall Heap, a bustling, voluble little man, who was also a guardian, a vestryman, and an active member of the Liberal organization, so that his time was pretty well taken up.

On this occasion the usual practice was discarded, and, to suit Mr. Clayton's convenience, the meeting was held in the deacons' vestry in the chapel. Mr. Porlick and his niece walked there together, the former explaining the course he intended to adopt.



"That Loomes woman must go," he declared; "she's absolutely incompetent, and I know of some one who would do the work for fifteen pounds less, and do it a great deal better. Mind you back up what I say; I'll lead up to it, you'll only have to keep your ears open and your tongue ready."

"I'd much rather not say anything. I'm sure she means well, and I think if the committee have her in and talk to her, things will go much better. If you were in the chair, you could soon make her see what is wanted."

This last sentence was politic, and Mr. Porlick's tone showed that he had noticed the compliment.

"Of course I could, but talking's no good. She's got to go, and the sooner it's settled the better. I'll ask you some questions as secretary, and all you have to do is just to state the facts."

The meeting was a full one, all the members being present with the exception of Mr. Hucknall Heap. Mr. Cartwright called on Mr. Clayton to open the proceedings with a few words of prayer, the secretary read the minutes, which were duly confirmed, and then certain small matters arising out of them were discussed. During the discussion, Mr. Porlick drummed with his fingers on the table, evidently impatient to get rid of these trifles.

"That, I think," said the chairman, "is all that arises on the minutes. Is there any other business?"

And instinctively and apprehensively he glanced in the direction of Mr. Porlick.

"Yes, there is," exclaimed that gentleman, in his most rasping tones; "I've got a matter of the greatest importance to bring before the committee.

It isn't a pleasant matter, and a good many people would be glad to shirk it, but some of you know I'm not the sort of man to shirk a duty because it happens to be disagreeable. I'm a very busy man, but when I do a thing at all I like to do it well, so I often visit this Orphanage, and I don't always say when I'm coming. When I go, I keep my eyes open, and I'm sorry to say I see and hear a good many things going on that shouldn't. Look here——"

Mr. Porlick took out of his pocket a small diary which he opened and laid on the table.

"*May* 10.—Paid surprise visit, 3 p.m. Matron not in—no one knew where she was—no message left. Found fires in four rooms (including matron's)."

"Now," said Mr. Porlick, impressively, "this was a bright spring day. There was really no need at all for any fires, but if there were any very delicate children who require coddling (which I don't believe in), one fire in one room would have been ample. Well, I noticed several things that were unsatisfactory, so next time I wrote and said I would come and see the matron that day week at six o'clock unless I heard to the contrary. I did not hear, but when I got to the place exactly at six o'clock, she actually had the impertinence to come out and say that she had some friends to tea, and was engaged. I asked her why she hadn't written, and she said she had. It was practically a lie, for she had sent a post-card—here it is—to Baker Street, which only reached there by the seven o'clock post."

"Did you ask her for an explanation, Mr. Porlick?" interposed the chairman.

"Certainly I did, and she wrote me a long, silly letter—four pages on foreign paper, and crossed! All drivel and excuses. She put the card out where letters for the post are put, and thought one of the girls would take it, and the girl thought *she* would, and why couldn't I write instead of coming? Well, I made another appointment for May 20th, at six o'clock. I saw her this time, and found her explanations of several matters I brought to her notice very unsatisfactory—some of them quite evasive. But before I left I unearthed a matter which I told her I should certainly bring before the committee. If you look at the accounts for the last three years you'll see that under the head 'Doctor's attendances' there is a steady increase. Now, I have always maintained that we oughtn't to pay a penny for doctors' visits. It would be quite easy to get students from the hospitals to come for nothing, or there are many young practitioners who would be only too glad to come for the sake of the experience and the advertisement. However, the committee have never put their foot down, and the extravagance goes on. Well, I asked about the doctor's visits, and I found there was a big bill just in, and when I pressed I found also that he had been at the Orphanage three times the week before. I asked what he had been called in for, and Mrs. Loomes said something about severe colds. I asked to see the children who were suffering, but she said it was bath night, and I couldn't see them. I looked at the bill, and I found it was the usual thing—'To medical attendance from such a date to such a date,' and then the lump sum charged. I asked several questions, but got unsatisfactory, and sometimes impertinent answers, which only made me more determined to

see the matter through. Consequently, when I left the Orphanage I went straight to the doctor, and asked him to furnish me with details from his books of the charges. Now, what do you suppose I discovered? Why, actually, six of his visits were to her—to Mrs. Loomes! She had an attack of influenza, and then this entirely private matter is mixed up with the Orphanage accounts. I consider it a most serious matter. I do not think a woman who can do such a thing is fit to remain at the head of an institution like this—I don't indeed! Besides that, she's too old for the work. She admits to fifty-five, and it's a good deal nearer sixty-five, I'm sure. She's thoroughly incompetent, and she hasn't an idea of business. As long as she's there the place will always be untidy. I'll undertake to say that a really competent matron would do the job better, and save us fifteen per cent. at least."

As Mr. Porlick finished his speech he leaned back and wiped his forehead. He was pleased with himself, and the awkward pause which followed was, he felt, a compliment to his oratorical powers.

The pause was broken at last by Miss Fallstaff.

"Well, sir," she began, addressing Mr. Cartwright, "I wish to say that I consider Mrs. Loomes a most excellent matron, and, with regard to the doctor's bill, I have no doubt she can give a perfectly satisfactory answer."

"Then why on earth didn't she?" interjected Mr. Porlick. "She can talk fast enough when she's anything to say."

"If she is asked by a gentleman in a gentlemanly way," said Miss Fallstaff, still looking at the chairman; "I have no doubt she will explain the matter at once."

"In my opinion," shouted Mr. Porlick, "she ought to be asked by a magistrate in a summary way, and I hope she will be."

"I think we are going a little too fast," said Mr. Clayton. "There certainly is something that seems to require an explanation in what Mr. Porlick has brought forward, though I dare say, as Miss Fallstaff says, the explanation may be quite simple."

"Hear, hear!" cried Mr. Porlick.

At this stage the chairman, who was looking very uncomfortable, interposed.

"Will the committee authorize me to see Mrs. Loomes on the matter, and report to them?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Filliter; "that'll be the best way."

"I move that," said Mr. Bostock.

"And I second," added Mr. Filliter.

Mr. Cartwright glanced round for any expression of dissent.

"Very good, then," he said, "I will make an early appointment."

"And I'll come, too, if I can manage it," cried Mr. Porlick.

"No, sir," said Miss Fallstaff, addressing Mr. Cartwright, "I think that would be a great mistake. The committee has asked *you* to see the matron."

"Eh, what?" asked Mr. Porlick. Thinking the meeting over, he had got up, and was looking for his hat. "Oh, that's all nonsense; two are better than one, eh, Mr. Cartwright?"

But Miss Fallstaff could be pertinacious.

"I think, sir," she said, "we ought to keep to the resolution we have just passed. It said nothing about Mr. Porlick."

"That is so," remarked Mr. Filliter. "We have asked Mr. Cartwright to interview the matron, and we leave the arrangements altogether in his hands."

"That's good enough for us, eh, Mr. Cartwright?" said Mr. Porlick, with a hearty laugh at Miss Fallstaff's evident discomposure, "and Miss Fallstaff can be present, too, if she wants to back up her friend."

As the committee slowly dispersed, Mr. Porlick went up to the minister—

"Come and have supper with us, Mr. Clayton. I have to go round by Gray's Road, but I shall be back in ten minutes, if you and Julia will come round together."

And he hurried off.

As usual, things seemed to turn out just in accordance with his wishes. Julia had a few figures to enter in the minute-book, and by the time she had finished only Mr. Clayton was left.

She had been greatly relieved by the turn things had taken at the meeting. Her uncle's questions, which she had dreaded, had never been asked, so that, for the time, at any rate, she had escaped what she had so feared—being forced into an appearance of hostility to the unfortunate matron.

As for the minister, he had been seized upon by Miss Fallstaff, who was excitedly pouring into his ear a strain of animated feebleness. Gently walking towards the door, he contrived at last to disengage himself from her, and returned to find Julia just putting together her papers.

She looked up with a smile.

"The penalties of the pontificate," she said

"Don't you sometimes wish you could be rude like ordinary mortals?"

"I'm afraid I am, without wishing it. I was rather short with poor Miss Fallstaff, but that was really your fault."

"Mine?" As she spoke she sprang up with some vague idea of stopping what in an instant she knew was imminent.

The moment, indeed, had taken them both by surprise; yet for a long time they had known that sooner or later it was bound to come.

"Julia," he began—it was the first time he had ever called her by her Christian name, and the sound was pleasant in her ears—"I am going to ask you a question; you know what it is."

"No, don't!" she cried; "please don't."

He started at the depth and earnestness of her tone, and a shade of fear fell across his face; but he went on, with a smile that was rather wan.

"There's no going back, now. And it is better so. Perhaps I have put it off too long. I love you."

They were silent for a moment that, they both of them felt, was one of the great moments of life. Those three simple words could never be unsaid. They formed the boundaries of a new life.

For an instant a swift tide of joy and exultation seemed to thrill her every vein. Then she remembered, and the tide ebbed.

"I tried to stop you——" she began, as though asking his forgiveness.

"Why should you?" he demanded impetuously, for he had read the signs, and knew that his love had fallen on no barren ground.

"Because I can't give you the answer you"—

she stopped a moment, then bravely changed the phrase—"I want to."

"Then you do love me?" he cried triumphantly.

"Yes—you have a right to know—I do."

His face shone.

"Then nothing and no one can forbid the banns!" he exclaimed.

She shook her head.

"Ah yes," she said softly, under her breath, "I must."

"Don't torture me, dear," he begged; "I can't guess your riddle. If we love each other, who shall stand between us?"

In a sense she was prepared. She had foreseen this, and had settled in her own mind what duty demanded. But now, brought face to face with human love at once imperious and pleading, her scruples seemed far fetched and pedantic—for the moment she felt ashamed of them, even at a loss how to express them in words.

As for him, he guessed it was some scruple of conscience that held her back. It might be, he thought, some feeling that her duty lay in her uncle's household. Whatever it was, it should not stand in the way of their happiness, he was determined.

"I couldn't be a minister's wife," she stammered. "I—I can't believe as you do."

Quick, sympathetic, emotional, he understood in a moment.

"I know what you mean," he said; "I've been there myself."

It was a real place to him, that wilderness of doubt.

"Then you must know it's impossible," she said quickly.

"But you will come out. Have faith. '*Seek and ye shall find.*'"

She shook her head a little impatiently. "I could answer you with another text, '*Can man by searching, find out God?*' But I've no heart to argue."

"No," he agreed, "arguing *is* no good. 'The mind seeks, it is the heart that finds.'"

"Who said that? A woman, surely. But it's no good. It only means, 'I choose to be blind,' and that's the one thing I can't choose. It would be no use either. I might keep my eyes shut for a little while—I'm not sure even of that."

"I want you to open them wide," he whispered.

"No," she answered, "you want me to see with yours."

"But, listen, dearest," he said, seizing her hand, and his very heart seemed to vibrate in his words. "I have had such a lonely life. I am more alone in the world than you, for you have your brother and your cousins—I have no one. My work has been father and mother and sister and brother to me. The voice of God called me to that work—I am as sure of it as I now am that you love me. He has blessed me with a hundred proofs of my calling—why should we shut our eyes and ears?"

Again she shook her head, and the tears stood in her eyes.

"I know how kind and good and devoted you are; I know you are perfectly sincere—but so was Saint Teresa—I came across her life the other day at a bookstall. Her experience is no help to me, because I have never shared it. You can buy books second-hand—not faith."

"I didn't finish what I was saying, as I meant to when I began," he resumed. "What I wanted to say was this, that I am just as sure now that God is bringing us together as I was of His call when it came to me. 'Whom God hath joined' —you know the rest."

As he spoke, there suddenly came upon her like some fierce gust of storm-wind a sense of her loneliness, of the hardness of her life, and of the bare, unlovely prospect that stretched in front of her. And here, comfort and companionship and love held out their hands. Why should she spurn them? Had she not done enough for honour and conscience? Some voice within told her it was now or never. And love imprisoned within her own heart, fought hard for happiness. She sat down and leaned her forehead on her hands.

"Don't tempt me," she cried; "I am very weak, and I am hungry for a little happiness. And I see trouble coming to meet me, and I am afraid of it. But I know it's wrong. If there be a God, He is warning me."

The agony in her voice stirred the young minister profoundly. He walked to the window without a word and stood there, silent, for a minute or two. Then he came back to the table and, stooping, spoke again, in a voice that was hardly more than a whisper.

"Listen, Julia dearest. Suppose I give up the ministry for a time. I have money enough and to spare. We will go abroad, and if you still feel as you do now, there are other ways in which I can earn a living."

She rose to her feet, and with a quick impulsive gesture, seized his hand.

"No, no!" she exclaimed; "for you with your beliefs, that would be a betrayal. We might love one another, but we should come to despise ourselves. One may pay too high a price even for love."

"But I can't give you up—oh, I can't, I *can't*. If you only knew how I have built on this hope!" Then, as the sad but resolute expression of her face shamed and rebuked him, he added—

"Promise me this, at least, if—as I trust and believe they will—your doubts clear away, will you then be my wife?"

She smiled.

"If ever I can, honourably—yes."

"Then we are engaged," he cried joyfully.

"No," she answered, "you are free."

"And you?" he persisted.

But just at this moment there came a discreet knock at the door, which made them both start. They had forgotten Bolton the caretaker.

"If you please, sir, a child has brought a note for you, and it has 'urgent' on it, so I thought I had better bring it in."

Mr. Clayton opened the note and read it hastily.

"Quite right, Bolton," he said. "You can put the lights out." Then, turning to Julia, he held out his hand.

"Mr. Foster has been taken worse—you heard of his accident, didn't you? I must go there at once. Please tell your uncle, and ask him to excuse me."

They could not revert to the subject which was in both their hearts. But what words left unexpressed, the clasp of their hands conveyed.

III

When Julia said that she saw trouble coming to meet her, she was using no vague figure of speech. The grim shadow was, indeed, close upon her, and she knew it.

Len had changed his lodging and his work at practically the same time. At first, both changes delighted him. He even broke forth into letters, a most unusual demonstration for him, and assured Julia that he was on the high-road to fortune, and that until now he had never known the meaning of the word comfort.

Fortune, however, is notoriously a fickle jade. Before long, Julia detected a change of tone. A querulous note indicated rebuffs and disappointments. And in due course there appeared what she had been fearing—a request for a loan. It was not that she grudged him the money. She considered herself quite wealthy now, and had already managed to save quite a respectable little hoard. She was by nature generous, and from childhood she had been accustomed to help him out of all his scrapes. Besides, she was passionately devoted to the memory of her mother, whose last message had been one commending the younger brother to her charge. But she was too clear-sighted for love to blind her, and she knew the weakness for which she

was quick to make allowance. She vehemently blamed their uncle for his treatment of the boy; but, like him, she looked facts in the face, and with the memory of her father to guide her, she could not help foreseeing the future of Len's career. The only hope, she thought, lay in some sudden, brilliant success. At first Len's easy self-confidence, fortified by two or three press-cuttings, made her almost as sanguine as he was himself, but her strong common-sense soon asserted itself, and with a heavy heart she learned to discount first his hopes and then his statements. And there came one dreadful day when, with a sinking heart, she recalled Mr. Porlick's bitter sneer about the waters of Bohemia. She had been obliged to follow her uncle to town in order to get his signature to a cheque which had been forgotten. At Baker Street she was told that he was at the Brain-bran Offices in the Strand. Thither she hastened, and there she found him. When their business was over, she walked towards Charing Cross, meaning to take the omnibus to Paddington. As she passed the Gaiety Restaurant she saw Len come out, closely followed by an elderly man in a tight frock-coat, who was wiping his long moustache with his handerchief. Len, wearing a slouch hat, a loose jacket, and a flannel shirt emphasized by a brilliant scarlet tie, spoke a hasty word to his companion who turned back to the Gaiety.

"Why, Ju, who would have thought of seeing you down here?" he exclaimed.

The moment he spoke, she knew he had been drinking, and her quick eyes took in the details of his flashy untidiness.

"Was that your friend Vincent?" she asked.

"That's the old chap," he answered loudly, and with a laugh that sounded silly.

"Oh, Len; why didn't you tell me your things were in such a state. Look at those cuffs. And there's a button gone from your coat. Oh, and what boots! You told me you were all right, and that Winifred looked after your things."

"Didn't you know?" he said, with a curious hesitating boldness. "I'm leaving them to-morrow."

"Leaving! Why, where are you going?" she asked, as they walked on together.

"Why"—his tone of embarrassment was passing away and giving place to an assumed rollicking swagger—"I'm going over to Hamburg. I've got an engagement at last—I knew it was bound to come. All through Vincent. Capital fellow is old Vincent."

"What sort of an engagement?" she asked, ignoring the eulogium.

"Oh, concert singing. Every one says it's a splendid chance. I'm a made man, my dear." As he spoke he began to cough.

Her anxiety took a new direction.

"That doesn't sound like singing. Do be careful, Len. You know you're not strong enough to play any tricks with yourself. Why, those boots would let the water through in five minutes."

And she proceeded to put him through a catechism, the result of which was very unsatisfactory.

"You aren't telling me the whole truth, I'm certain," she said finally. "It's lucky I've got some money in my purse. Look! Here are three sovereigns and some silver. I'll take a shilling to get home with. The rest will help to outfit you."

He took the purse, but his face flushed.

"You're too good, Ju," he said. "I wish I were like you. No poor devil ever had such a sister."

And the ready tears stood in his eyes.

"Don't talk nonsense," she said rather brusquely, for the thought of their mother's charge was heavy upon her, and she was afraid of breaking down. "Come in here, and get some decent boots."

She saw that he got the absolutely necessary things, and when they had been bought, it was time to take the omnibus.

"What will your new address be?" she asked.

"I'm going to stay with Vincent at his diggings in Museum Street for a night or two; I go to Hamburg on Friday. I'll write to you as soon as I get there."

"You won't forget, will you, Len?" she said wistfully; "you *will* write?"

"Yes," he answered, with unusual seriousness; "I will, honour bright."

"It's a promise, mind," she persisted, as the omnibus lumbered up.

He nodded, and before she divined his purpose, put his hand on her shoulder and kissed her; whereupon it became her turn to flush, for her omnibus was nearly full, and it seemed to her one vast smile as she climbed to the top.

The last she saw of Len was a waving hand with a slouch hat in it.

IV

THREE days after—on the Friday morning—she received a letter with the Hamburg post-mark. It came by the first delivery, and from the expression on her uncle's face as he handed it to her, she felt sure he had recognized the writing. He made no remark, however, and she slipped the letter in her pocket and did not look at it again till he was safely out of the house.

Then, when she was alone in the dining-room with Lizzie, she took it out and read it.

"Hamburg.

"DEAR JU,

"I am afraid this letter will upset you a bit, especially as I misled you only two or three days ago (but it seems an age already). What I told you was true enough as far as it went, but it didn't go very far, which is just what I am going to do. The truth is, I have an engagement, but it is over in New York. I am going by a German ship from Hamburg. There was no chance for me in London. Every one said I should have been a big success if I could have had a couple of years' grind. You've heard of Vasili, the Russian pianist. Through a friend of Vincent's I got an introduction to him. He let me play to him and tried over

ome of my things himself, and he told me I had t in me; but I must work, work, work. He vould have taken me as a pupil (he doesn't give essons, either) if I could have kept myself. I iearly went to Baker Street to try the big brute gain, but I couldn't stand his bullying any more, nd I knew I should get nothing else. Then, just s I was chewing the disappointment, Vincent rought me this offer. It comes through a fellow I ised to know, who has gone over to America and s getting on like a house on fire. He says I'm ertain to make a hit. Anyway he sent over the assage-money, so he's ready to back his opinion. By the way, there's one thing I ought to tell you— dare say you'd hear of it, in any case. I owed the Beckton's a bit for rent and board. They've been egular trumps about it, all along. Just before I ame away, I was looking over my traps and came cross that old portfolio—you know. I had it down-tairs, and was showing some of father's sketches to Beckton when we came across those drawings of he bolt. He pounced on them like a hawk, and leclared it must be a later design and a great im-rovement. He said he was sure it would be vorth while putting it on the market, and there vould be a lot of money in it. So I told him he vas welcome to the idea, and as he seemed to think here was really something in it, and I owed him ome rent, I would make him a present of the rawings for him to do what he liked with. It idn't strike me at the time, but I suppose they elong to you as much as to me. Still, I know you von't let me down, though I'm afraid it won't do Beckton any good. Poor old Vincent has lent me pound which I am going to send him back out

of my first earnings on the other side. Or, better still—for he may have moved half a dozen times—you might send him the pound to 18a, Museum Street, at once. That will make four pounds thirteen shillings and sixpence I owe you. I won't forget. I'm turning over the biggest leaf you ever saw, and quite time too. I had a queer dream the other night. I saw mother standing on a ship and beckoning me with that jolly smile of hers when she was pleased with us. I suppose it was crossing on the steamer made me dream it, but it's put me in good spirits. It means good luck, or I'm a Dutchman. Good-bye for the present, but not for long.

"Yours, with a lot of love,

"LEN.

"Give my love to Lizzie, and thank her up and down for the macintosh: it's the most elegant and up-to-date water-resister I've ever seen, and must have cost a mint of money. If we're shipwrecked I'll get one of the sailors to sew me up in it, and I'll float to land as dry as a sermon. My ship is the *Venedig*, and she will have sailed before you get this. She is due at Sandy Hook the 18th of next month."

This letter was a great shock to Julia. Rigidly straightforward herself, Len's laxity in the matter of truth had always been a secret trouble to her, and this fresh instance hurt her keenly. "Why couldn't he have trusted me?" she said to herself, and was surprised to feel the rare tears springing to her eyes. One, indeed, rolled down her cheek, and at the same moment Lizzie's hand touched her arm.

"What is it, Ju?" she asked; "you look so sad"



They were more like sisters than cousins now, and had few secrets from one another. Without a word of explanation, Julia read the letter through aloud, only leaving out the reference to Mr. Porlick.

"Perhaps it's for the best," said Lizzie, after a pause. "It must be a great experience to go across the ocean. Len's no coward, is he?"

"No," answered Julia, her face lighting up, 'that he's not. Dear boy, I do hope he won't be disappointed."

"I wish father would have let him study music," said Lizzie, rather sadly.

"Yes; it would have been the best thing, no doubt. But it's no good crying for the moon. Only I wish he had told me plainly where he was going. It makes me feel as though there were something more behind."

"Didn't he tell you he was going to America? You knew he was going abroad. You told me, didn't you?"

"I knew he was going to Hamburg. I never dreamed of his going to America."

"He says it's a good opening."

"Yes, I hope it is; but I'm afraid for Len."

Lizzie understood. She was a shrewd young woman, and had her own misgivings.

"Boys are always more careless about money than girls—they grow out of it."

"Why didn't he come and tell me? Fancy running into debt with Winifred! I can't get over that."

"Still, he seems to have come to some sort of a settlement."

"Oh, those drawings! What's the good of that? No, I must find out how much it is."

"Ju," said Lizzie, in a coaxing whisper, after a minute or two's silence, "I've got a lot of money doing no good. Will you——"

"No, dear, I won't," said Julia, kissing her.

"But, if you really want it, you'll let me help. After all, it's in the family. If Len is your brother, he's my cousin. If it were to save his honour or to give him a better chance, you surely wouldn't be too proud to let me do something. I didn't think you would treat me as a stranger."

Julia's heart smote her.

"Listen, Liz," she said, putting her arm round her; "no sister could be dearer to me than you are, and if there is real need, I'll come and beg as if you were a subscriber to the Orphanage."

"As if!" exclaimed Lizzie, indignantly.

"Oh yes, I forgot. I believe I've got your receipt in my pocket."

V

JULIA lost no time in calling upon Mrs. Beckton, and characteristically went straight to the point.

"There's nothing the matter at Goldcroft, I hope?" said the ex-governess. "You look as though something were weighing you down."

"I've had a letter from Len that has upset me a good deal. He tells me he has left in your debt."

Mrs. Beckton flushed.

"No, indeed not, we squared up before he went."

"Ah, I know what you mean, but I don't call that squaring up. Business is business, as Uncle Josiah says."

"But it's just the other way about. He's told you about the drawings, I suppose. Well, they show a great improvement on the bolt. Frank says it's practically a new thing, and may be a splendid property. He thought of trying to get up a syndicate to work it, but I want him first to offer it to your uncle. It might and probably would interfere with the sale of the bolt as he makes it. In any case, of course you and Len will have an interest in it."

Julia nodded. The thought flashed through her mind that perhaps retribution was dogging her uncle's footsteps after all.

"Mr. Beckton will have to be very careful in dealing with Uncle Josiah," she said quietly.

"Yes, he feels that; but I am so anxious not to quarrel openly, because of Lizzie."

"Ah, yes, I see," said Julia, "perhaps it's the best thing to do, but I shall be very surprised if it doesn't come to a quarrel. But about Len's debt. If I can, I'd like to settle it, apart from this bolt. If I can't at once, I can gradually. I'm earning quite a lot now."

For a long time Mrs. Beckton refused to entertain the suggestion, but at last Julia's persistence and her evident eagerness prevailed, and she produced the little account-book in which the weekly dues were recorded. The total was smaller than Julia had feared—some five pounds odd, and she smiled with an air of great relief.

"I'll send it you to-morrow," she said, "and thank you ever so much. I wish Len had come to me at once."

"The drawings belong to you again now," said Mrs. Beckton.

Julia thought for a moment.

"No," she said, at last, "Len handed them over to Mr. Beckton, and he's been thinking and planning and very likely spending money over them. They shall remain in his hands. If anything comes of it, we'll all share."

Beckton, however, could not put the matter before Mr. Porlick at once. He had shown the drawings to his partner, who was delighted with the idea, and was ready to help as far as his means would allow. Then there were legal aspects to be considered, for Beckton fully intended Julia and

Len to share in what his naturally sanguine temperament told him would be a magnificent success. At the same time he had a wholesome dread of high-class lawyers and experts, and had consulted a friend of his, an articled clerk in a solicitor's office. With his assistance, Beckton drew up a simple form of agreement by which he bound himself to pay to Julia and Len one-third each of any net profits accruing in respect of the sale or working of the invention.

He was decidedly disconcerted when his wife told him of Julia's visit and its result. Undoubtedly this new development did alter the situation. Instead of being the owner of the contrivance, he would now be only an agent, or at best a partner. After the first shock, however, he took matters philosophically enough. Indeed, he soon came to think that perhaps it was just as well. It would now be a purely business arrangement which a lucky chance had put in his way, and there could be no question of his having taken any undue advantage. On the other hand, he had never liked the idea of offering the new bolt to Mr. Porlick, and he felt the difficulties of this course were increased now that Len and Julia were virtually the owners and he only acting for them. Julia, however, insisted that the agreement should stand, only altering the form so as to make it clear that the three were co-owners. All these arrangements and considerations took time, so that it was a fortnight after Len sailed, before Beckton revisited his ancient haunts in Baker Street.

Mr. Porlick could hardly believe his ears when the visitor was announced. He disliked him as he disliked every one to whom he had behaved badly.

He was conscious in his own mind that Beckton had not been treated well, but he had been tolerably successful in thrusting that feeling into the background and bringing to the front various instances of his former secretary's extravagance and laziness. However, he instructed Herbert to show the visitor up to his little office.

"It's either begging, or he's wanting to come back," he said to himself, as the door opened.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Porlick," said the visitor, with a genial nod.

Mr. Porlick expected him to hold out his hand, and had already resolved to snub him by putting both his own hands in his pockets. This part of his programme he now proceeded to carry into effect, though the demonstration had lost its point.

"I'm very busy; what do you want?" he grunted ungraciously.

"I've called on a little matter of business," replied the other; "it has reference to the Newdigate bolt."

"Eh?" ejaculated Mr. Porlick, at once both puzzled and keenly interested.

"The bolt, as at present made, has two defects—one is, that it's awkward to fix, because of that projecting flange; the other is, that it's not very difficult to force. Now, you'll see from this that I have a bolt here which retains all the advantages of the Newdigate, but is bevelled off instead of having a flange, and this simple alteration in the knob which runs into this cross-slot makes it very awkward to force. You see, by giving the knob a half-turn after it's shot home, it locks. It looks a small alteration, but it doubles the value of the bolt."

He had taken out a small model which he had



had made, and which he put on the table before Mr. Porlick.

Mr. Porlick's keen eyes seemed fixed on his visitor's face, but he took in at a glance the points of the model. It was quite true. This would, indeed, make an almost perfect bolt. Yet, as it lay there, the difference seemed so slight; it was still surely *his* bolt, the Newdigate.

"Well," he said, and Beckton recognized at once the dangerous suavity of his tone, "I'm sure it's very obliging of you to show me this. Are these improvements, as you call them, your contrivance?"

Beckton hesitated. His own idea had been not to disclose the inventor's name. But Julia had insisted that sooner or later it was certain to come out, and that it would be far better to be perfectly frank from the first.

"No," he said, with a smile; "that's not in my line. I'm only the agent."

"Whom are you acting for?"

"Why, Mr. Porlick, if you ask me point-blank, I will give you an equally plain answer. Your nephew, Leonard Hastings."

"Who?" cried Mr. Porlick, all the suavity gone in a moment, as first amazement and then black anger seized him. "Who?"

"Your nephew who was here, who took my place."

"Ah—I see—a conspiracy!" began Mr. Porlick, with husky wrath. Then, suddenly a thought flashed into his mind, and, putting constraint upon himself, he asked, in quite a different tone—

"Do you mean it was that boy's idea?"

"No; but he had the drawings. He found

them, I believe, in a portfolio which contained a lot of his father's papers."

"And how do they come in your hands?"

"When he went away, he gave them to me to do the best I could with them."

"The best for whom?"

"For both of us."

"What did you pay for them?"

Beckton picked up the model, and put it in his coat-pocket.

"I thought it fair and right," he said, "to come to you and give you the refusal. If you don't care to take it, I dare say there are others who will."

Mr. Porlick stood up, and deliberately turned his back on his visitor, who at once moved towards the door. Just as he was opening it, Mr. Porlick faced round again.

"I'll think it over," he said, "and give you an answer to-morrow at twelve."

He spoke quietly, and Beckton chuckled as he went downstairs.

"Had to come off his high horse, this time. All the same, I'd rather he hadn't had anything to do with it."



VI

THAT afternoon Mr. Porlick left the office rather earlier than usual, and, instead of making at once for Paddington, he took an omnibus down Holborn. At Great Turnstile he got off, and made his way to Lincoln's Inn Fields. On the door-post of No. 58 was painted, in neat characters, "First floor—Ellis, Coulson, Bates, and Cartwright. Commissioners."

To his relief he found that Albert was still in the office, and he was soon seated in his son-in-law's room.

"Well, Albert," he began, "how's Ellen?"

"Quite well, sir, thank you."

"It seems a long time since we have seen either of you at Goldcroft. I just called round to remind you. When will you come?"

"I can't say for certain; but I'll tell Ellen, and she will write at once."

"Very good—as soon as you can. By-the-by, I may have a bit of work to put in your way soon."

"Not a suit, I hope."

"Hope, eh? Ah, I know you lawyers. Still, it'll all be in the family. Well—well, don't forget about writing."

As he spoke, Mr. Porlick took up his hat and umbrella, and walked to the bookshelves.

"'Conveyancing'—'Company Law'—ah, that ought to be interesting—'Mortgages'—yes—'Law of Patents'—is there much law about them?"

"Yes, a lot," answered Albert, with a smile.

"If an inventor dies before he takes out a patent, what happens? There's a poser for you," said Mr. Porlick, in a tone of heavy banter.

"I believe there's a section in the Act to cover the case."

"Believe—believe!" exclaimed Mr. Porlick, with a benevolent smile, but shaking his head; "I'm afraid I mustn't bring my patent cases to you, Albert."

"Well, it isn't a point that often arises; but I believe I'm right," replied the lawyer, taking down the book, and turning to the index—"yes, here it is—his personal representative can take it out, if he applies within six months."

"And after that?"

"The right's gone."

"H'm!" said Mr. Porlick; "seems a bit hard, doesn't it? But I suppose the law can do no wrong. Well, I've learnt something by coming here, but I mustn't stop. Mind you come soon, the pair of you. Good-bye, my boy."

And, with his most genial and delightful smile, Mr. Porlick departed, looking quite a picture of happy, handsome prosperity.

But it was a very different face he wore the next morning, when Beckton called to hear his decision. His words, however, were peaceable enough.

"Have you got the original drawings, or a tracing of them?" he asked.

"Here are the tracings," said Beckton, cautiously.

Mr. Porlick gave one rapid glance at the paper, then tossed it back.

"Well," he said, "and what's your proposition?"

There was something about his tone that Beckton didn't like. It was not particularly rough or rude; it was rather the suggestion it seemed to convey, that the speaker had fully made up his mind on a matter of trivial import.

"We thought it right," he answered, "to give you the opportunity of taking up the invention, if you wished to. In that case, we are willing either to sell it to you outright, or to accept a royalty. I may say, we should prefer the royalty, because, as you know, it is very difficult to forecast the value of an invention."

Beckton spoke without any veiled meaning, but his words seemed to irritate Mr. Porlick beyond endurance. He flushed purple—the usual danger signal of his worst temper—and began violently—

"What d'you mean by that, you——?"

Then, suddenly restraining himself and laying his head a little on one side, he looked at Beckton with what that young man thought the very ugliest smile he had ever seen on a human countenance.

"Do you mean to say, as a business man, that you have come here to sell an article, and can't even put a price on it yourself?"

"We will carefully consider any offer you like to make, Mr. Porlick," said Beckton, stiffly, for he was satisfied now that nothing would come of the interview.

"Now, look here, Beckton," said Mr. Porlick, getting up from his chair, and assuming his favourite position in front of the fireplace, "I've had enough

of this. You're a funny fellow, though I don't suppose you know it; but I've got plenty of work to do, and I can't waste any more time on you and your nonsense."

"Then I'll wish you good morning," said the other, taking up his hat.

"You'll hear what I've got to say, first, unless you're a bigger fool even than I think you. You know, I always told you you were an unprincipled, silly fellow, and now, you see, I'm right. At any rate, this is certain" — Mr. Porlick's voice was getting louder and rougher with every sentence— "you're one or the other—either a knave or a fool. If you came here knowing that you'd got nothing to sell, and tried to get me to bid for it, you ought to be in prison. If you really thought those precious drawings were of any value, you ought to be in an asylum. Either way, you've no business to be at large."

Angry as Beckton was, something in his adversary's tone and manner both impressed and depressed him, but he tried to put a bold face on it.

"If you don't give up bullying, I'm afraid you won't live long," he said. "You look just as if you were on the edge of a fit, now. As for the drawings, when the bolt they represent is well on the market, I think you'll find they're what you called them—precious."

Mr. Porlick had turned hastily to the glass at the word "fit." He now spoke in a much quieter tone as he sat down again at his writing-table.

"I suppose you *are* a fool, Beckton, then," he said. "Do you really mean to say you don't know that six months after a man's death, the right to

ake out a patent is clean gone? You've been kind nough to show me the improvements. I'm much bliged to you, I'm sure. I can, and of course I hall adopt them at once. You'll see an improved lewdigate on the market before many weeks are ut. There, there, I don't want to hear any more.)ff you go. I'm busy. I declare if you had a ttle more blood in your veins I believe *you'd* have fit now."

VII

For some time Julia had been declining in favour with her formidable uncle. What he called her dilly-dallying with the minister had intensely annoyed him. The reason suggested by Lizzie—religious scruples—he set down as the flimsiest excuse. At the same time he found it difficult to think of any more likely cause. Finally, he fell back on sheer obstinacy and contrariety.

"She's got her mother's will," he said to himself. "Jane was always stiff-necked, but I'll break this girl's will, or I'll turn her out."

It vexed him the more because for so long he had praised her far more generously than was his wont, and this unexpected stand seemed to him to suggest ingratitude as well as obstinacy.

Then came the impeachment of Mrs. Loomes. As it happened, he was prevented from attending the interview between her and Mr. Cartwright. He wired to the latter, asking that the meeting might be postponed, but the telegram arrived too late, "so he said," Mr. Porlick remarked when talking the matter over with Lizzie. Then came a committee meeting, to which Mr. Cartwright reported that the matron's explanation, though not perhaps perfectly satisfactory, showed nothing worse than a certain want of method and a misunderstanding

between her and the doctor. Thereupon, Mr. Clayton moved and Mr. Filliter seconded a motion to the effect that the committee thanked the Treasurer for calling their attention to the question of medical attendance at the Orphanage and directed that in future the doctor's accounts should be submitted to them every quarter.

This, however, did not by any means satisfy Mr. Porlick. He had indeed, already, in his own mind, provided a successor to Mrs. Loomes. Mrs. Cross, after a bad season, had fallen into arrears, a state of things which Mr. Porlick never allowed. Accordingly he had sold the lease and goodwill of the Charlotte Street boarding-house over her head, and had practically turned her out. Any qualms he might have felt, had been stifled in their birth when the happy thought occurred to him that she should be installed as Matron of the Orphanage with a reduction of ten pounds a year from the salary.

It was, therefore, a disagreeable surprise to find the committee disinclined to disturb the present arrangements. He immediately had recourse to his most familiar weapon, and began to bluster and threaten resignation. To his astonishment and secret dismay Mr. Clayton at once said that, though for his own part he should deeply regret the loss of such a colleague, yet, on a question of principle, he did not think they ought to allow themselves to be swayed by personal feelings.

"But that's just what you all are doing," cried Mr. Porlick. "For years, this old woman has been mismanaging the place, if nothing worse, and though *you* may be satisfied about the doctor's bill, I'm not, and I don't care who knows it."

"I don't think we can go into that again," said the chairman, "we have just dealt with the matter by resolution, but of course if Mr. Porlick has anything else that he wishes to bring forward with regard to the domestic arrangement of the Orphanage, we shall be perfectly ready to consider it—at least that is how it strikes me."

This remark was received with a chorus of "Hear, hear."

In answer to this, Mr. Porlick proceeded to make a further onslaught on the unfortunate matron, and this time with lowering brow and hectoring voice endeavoured to utilize his niece as witness for the prosecution.

It was an extremely unpleasant position for Julia, and her obvious discomfort enlisted the sympathies of the committee on her behalf and still further estranged them from her uncle. He soon began to treat her as a hostile witness and more than once the chairman intervened to defend her from his rudeness.

At last the matter was brought to a head by Mr. Porlick moving that Mrs. Loomes be given a month's notice. No one seconding the motion, Mr. Porlick began to make energetic signals to Julia. These, however, she disregarded, and as no seconder appeared, the motion was not even put to the vote.

Thereupon Mr. Porlick gave a very pretty manifestation of temper. Jumping up, he snatched his hat from a chair and bounced out of the room, slamming the door behind him. Two or three of the members exchanged glances, but nothing was said, and the committee proceeded to deal with its routine work.

But Mr. Porlick, glowering in his study, did not get to put down another black mark against ia's name.

The next thing that happened to increase his satisfaction was the resignation by Mr. Clayton is pastorate. This, Mr. Porlick rightly attributed Julia's attitude, and it annoyed him exceedingly. r one thing he really liked the minister's aching; for another, it seemed definitely to put end to the arrangement on which the show of position had made him set his heart. It seemed h an ideal disposition by which the duty laid on him by his sister would have been nobly charged and he himself absolutely freed from y further responsibility and expense in the tter.

And now on the top of all this, came the sus- ion that his niece had had something to do with at he called the scandalous attempt to blackmail n. If Len was a party to the conspiracy, his ter would at least be cognizant of it. Ah, what a st of vipers had he been nursing in his bosom!

So it was that, as soon as Beckton mentioned n's name as the owner of the new invention, Mr. rlick's thoughts had turned to the sister who was ll within reach of his tongue. His first impulse s to go home and have it out with her at once. en he remembered that she was that evening conduct a drawing-room meeting on behalf of e Orphanage, which would be sure to make her e. Besides, he was uncertain as to his legal sition. Thereupon, the happy idea occurred to n of calling at his son-in-law's office and extract- g from him a gratis opinion. Armed with this,

he would deal with Beckton in the morning, and Julia in the evening.

All through dinner he observed a gloomy silence which even Lizzie soon ceased to assault, and which every one recognized as the sure presage of a storm. Only Hugh, who was shooting up into a tall young fellow, and who showed signs of a high spirit that Mr. Porlick had for some time noted with growing disapproval, kept up a vigorous conversation with Julia.

Mr. Porlick listened to every word, the frown deepening on his forehead, for he had always counted it high treason for any one to be cheerful at his table when he was the reverse.

As soon as the meal was over he got up, and, laying his heavy hand on Julia's shoulder, said, in his roughest tone—

"Come into my study; I've got something to say to you."

Hugh, thinking himself safe behind his father's broad back, made a humorous gesture, but he forgot the mirror, and Mr. Porlick turned round savagely.

"Go to bed, you insolent puppy," he cried.

Hugh sprang up, with flashing eyes and scarlet cheeks, flung out of the room, and the next moment the sound of the hall door, slammed violently, rang through the house.

Julia rose, and, without even a look towards Lizzie, followed her uncle upstairs.

"Shut the door!" snapped Mr. Porlick from his armchair.

She obeyed, and, uninvited, sat down.

"What do you know about those drawings of your father's?" he demanded, in his loud, hectoring voice.

She answered with another question.

"Has Mr. Beckton been to you about them?" he asked.

"Answer my question, will you?" he rejoined.

"I knew there were some drawings in an old ortfolio, but I had no idea they were worth anyiing. Then, after Len had gone away, I heard iat he had given them to Mr. Beckton, and that iey were of some value. As soon as I heard iat, I urged that they should be shown to you rst of all."

"I see. You thought it would be easy to levy lackmail on me. Well, you've made a mistake, and eckton knows it now if you don't. I sent him off ith a flea in his ear, the silly fool."

"Oh! Has Mr. Beckton been to seen you?" ie asked. "I am so glad."

"Never mind about your gladness," he exlaimed, "just answer my questions, and don't revaricate."

She flushed angrily.

"I'm not in the habit of prevaricating——" she egan; but her uncle interrupted her rudely.

"I don't want any speeches. You shan't wriggle ut of my question. What do you know about these rawings?"

"I know that Len had them in an old portfolio, ith a lot of father's sketches and papers."

"How did they get into Beckton's hands?"

"Len owed him some money, and gave them to im to pay the debt."

"Then either Beckton was lying or you are. He aid they belonged to you and Len."

"So they do. I paid Len's debt."

"Oh! I begin to see. You paid the debt to get

the drawings into your own hands. You thought they were worth a lot. Not a bad move."

"Only, as it happens, I didn't make it. I thought it was very likely they were worth nothing at all, and I didn't want Mr. Beckton to lose through Len."

"Still," continued Mr. Porlick, with an ugly sneer, "you thought you might as well see what could be squeezed out of me—eh? Speak up."

"Mr. Beckton thought there was something in the drawings, and he got advice that seemed to bear it out. When I paid off Len's debt he told me this, and offered to give me back the drawings; but I knew he had already spent money and taken trouble over it, so I said he had better go on; but I stipulated that before any steps were taken to get a patent or form a syndicate to work it, the circumstances should be explained to you, and the invention offered to you."

"Invention offered to me!" exclaimed Mr. Porlick, with a sudden explosion of anger. "Why, it's my own; I bought it years ago, and glad enough your father was to get hold of my money."

He put a fiercely contemptuous emphasis on the "your father." The truth was, the restraint he had hitherto been obliged to put upon himself when speaking of Hastings had irked him. It was not the least satisfactory element in the present situation that at last he was unmuzzled.

As for Julia, she had lived long enough under her uncle's roof to learn the signs of his moods and tempers. She saw that this was no passing fit of irritability; it was a serious quarrel, she understood, that he was seeking to fasten upon her. Had it not been for Lizzie, this would not have greatly troubled her, but the thought of leaving Lizzie was almost

unbearable. And, with this in her mind, she determined, as far as possible, to decline her uncle's challenge. She allowed, therefore, even the sneer at her father to pass unnoticed, and kept back a word or two that hung upon her lips as she thought of the original bargain.

Mr. Porlick was in no doubt as to the reason of her silence.

"Aha!" he said to himself, "I've got her well under the screw at last, and she knows it."

Then he went on aloud—

"You think yourself very clever! Oh, I've been watching you for months. You knew my wish to see you comfortably settled; and, just because I wished it, you get your miserable, obstinate temper up, and baulk my plans. Then, instead of helping me on the Orphanage Committee, you do the best you can for that swindling, hypocritical old woman who ought to be in gaol, and all the time you think you've got such a fine card up your sleeve. *Never mind about Uncle Josiah*, you say to yourself, *I've got a rod in pickle for him. I'll bring him to his knees, if he says a word.* Ah, miss, it isn't Uncle Josiah that'll be on his knees; it's you—you and that young reprobate, and Beckton—the whole gang of you. I believe I could put you all in the dock to-morrow for trying to obtain money by false pretences. I shall consult my lawyers, and if you've brought yourselves within the clutches of the law you shall have your deserts."

Mr. Porlick had by this time lashed himself into a noble passion. His face was purple, and the veins stood out on his temples like gnarled and twisted rootlets; but he controlled his voice, and kept it a low, harsh growl of anger.

Julia stood up.

"I don't know in the least what you mean about false pretences, Uncle Josiah," she said; "but as to the other matters, I could not help doing what I did. Mr. Clayton knows it was not caprice or obstinacy that made me say no; and, as to the Orphanage, I simply spoke the exact truth."

Mr. Porlick seemed to ruminate for a minute or two, and when he spoke again his voice was more natural.

"Now, Julia, for your poor mother's sake, I will give you one more chance. I will try to believe what you say about these drawings, though it isn't at all easy. I might perhaps make myself think that you have been only a dupe all through—that you really thought there was something worth buying, and that you wished me to have the first offer—that is what you want me to believe?"

He waited for an answer.

"That is the truth," she answered.

"So you say," he returned, "and if you showed me that you are not actuated by spite and obstinacy I might possibly accept your statement, and pass over the Orphanage affair as a mere error of judgment. You know it is my wish to see you comfortably settled in life. Mr. Clayton is anxious to make you his wife. It is a most excellent marriage for you. He is able, pious, and successful, even though his judgment is not always to be trusted. All I ask of you is to accept him if he asks you to."

"But, uncle, you surely can't wish me to do what my conscience plainly tells me I ought not to. There are many things that make the offer a real temptation."

The last words she spoke half under her breath

and Mr. Porlick fancied he could detect a waver in her voice.

"Then be reasonable," he said, "and yield to it. I have had a longer experience than yours. You may take it from me that, when you are once married, all these scruples will seem to you ridiculous. Come, Julia, your uncle's friendship may be worth more than you think. Do as I wish, and you shall never regret it."

In his anxiety to gain his point, Mr. Porlick's voice grew quite tender, and he even stretched out his hand to take hold of hers.

But Julia knew him well enough to appraise these manifestations at their true value. Still she was unwilling to quarrel.

"He will not ask me again," she said; "we have had a long talk, and he has accepted my decision. If I wanted to revoke it, the time has gone by."

"Well," said Mr. Porlick, with surprising mildness, "I don't ask you to perform impossibilities. If he really won't have you, there's an end of the matter; but, if he asks you again, will you say yes?"

"If I ever feel I can, without doing wrong, I will."

"No, no; that won't do for me. If he asks you to-morrow, will you say 'Yes'?"

"I can't, uncle," she answered, in a low voice; "indeed, I can't."

"Then I've done with you," he shouted, suddenly slipping his temper from the leash, "and out you go. Ah, you and your brother, and your father—a precious trio you are. Two of you drunkards, if nothing worse, and the third an obstinate, ungrateful hypocrite. I only wish you'd never

darkened my door. Out you go; do you hear? To-morrow you take away your traps, and see how you like living on your salary—if you keep it—and the profits of your bolt."

But Julia had her share of the Porlick temper. Drawn up to her full height, she faced her uncle with angry cheeks and flashing eye.

"Say what you like about me," she cried, and her voice, if not so loud as his, was, to the full, as strident and as menacing; "but for very shame's sake hold your tongue about father and Len. You cheated the one—you know you did—you can't look me in the face—and you treated Len almost as badly as you did your own son. I've heard you say yourself that you're a hard man; you're more—you're a bad man. If it were not for one thing, I'd be only too glad never to see you again."

He was conscious that in one respect at least she spoke the truth—he could not look her in the face. He had flung himself into his chair during her invective, and, covering his face with his hand, had pretended to be reading. But through his fingers he watched her; and though he now hated her with all his soul and mind, he was cowed. Furious as he was, she fascinated him. She reminded him of Jane in, what he called, "one of her tantrums;" but she was a far finer woman than ever her mother had been.

So, in absolute silence, he let her finish her speech, and go out of the room. Her vehemence, her boldness, and partly, perhaps, the suddenness and surprise of the outburst, seemed to have stunned him.

Left alone, he gradually came to himself. And now, mingled with hatred, there was a sense of

shame that tingled and smarted with an almost physical pain. For one swift moment she had pierced the folds of mail that were as part of himself, and had reached that inner chamber of the soul where conscience still faintly breathed. It was a moment of agony, for in it he saw all his success built upon a deed of the meanest treachery. The next moment he was proof again. A hundred arguments and pleas trained by long service came hurrying at his call, reforged the severed links, and lulled his conscience to its wonted sleep. His stainless record as a business man living in the eyes of all men, his rigid observance of the great commandment—"Owe no man anything," his unimpeachable credit, his long unbroken success, the seal, surely, of Heaven's approval; to thoughts such as these he turned for comfort, and not in vain. But as his self-esteem returned in full measure, his resentment against Julia blazed into fiercer wrath for the humiliation she had made him suffer.

It was one of his boasts that no oath had ever passed his lips; but there was scriptural warrant for cursing the wicked, and solemnly and fervently he cursed his niece.

While he was thus occupied, he heard a knock at the door. For a moment he thought it was Julia come back. He had noticed the "if it were not for one thing" which had modified her closing sentence. This, he reasoned, could only mean that she recognized the danger of being left entirely to her own precarious resources. Perhaps she had returned to ask his forgiveness. At the thought a fierce joy filled his heart, and he answered with a loud "Come in!" Then the door opened, and Lizzie stood on the threshold.

VIII

For a moment they gazed on one another in mute astonishment. Lizzie had surprised on her father's face an expression she had never seen there before —an eager and confident revenge laughed horridly in his eyes. He, for his part, was amazed to see the tears running down her cheeks. Then it suddenly struck him. Of course Julia had been whining to her, and trying to set her against him! His countenance resumed its usual expression, and only his voice revealed the excitement under which he was still labouring.

"Well, Liz," he said, "what do you want?"

She walked across the room to where he sat, and laid her hand lightly on his arm.

"Oh, father dear," she said, "Julia isn't going, is she? Don't let her go. If you are angry with her, I'm sure there's some mistake. She didn't mean to vex you."

This was more than Mr. Porlick could bear.

"Go away!" he cried; "I'm not going to discuss it with you or any one else. She's a disgrace to my family, and I've turned her out of my house. That's enough for you. Go along."

But Lizzie stood her ground.

"Father dear," she urged, "don't do it—please don't. I know Ju so well—as well as if she were

a sister. I'm sure there is some misunderstanding; do let me try to clear it up. Family quarrels are so dreadful."

"There's no quarrel," said Mr. Porlick, thickly; "she's false, treacherous, ungrateful, and obstinately bent on her wickedness. I've found her out, and off she goes. There's no more to be said. I'm busy now. Go away!"

He spoke with increasing irritation. His wounded pride called out for a victim, and the bare notion that his favourite child was taking sides with the rebel maddened him.

Lizzie read the signs of the rising storm, but she did not quail. She had faith in her father's essential goodness, though she was not blind to what she called his surface faults. And this faith prompted her last attempt.

Dropping her voice almost to a whisper, she said—

"Mother was so fond of Ju, and Ju was so good to her. If she's done wrong, do forgive her, for mother's sake."

Unfortunately the effect of this speech was quite different from what she intended. Mrs. Porlick's one act of insubordination was still remembered against her, and the reference to her only suggested to Mr. Porlick a Biblical text.

"*A man's foes shall be those of his own household*," he said bitterly. "You all turn round upon me in turn. I have no peace, no happiness, nothing but worry, and vexation, and insults, and ingratitude."

And, suddenly dropping his head upon his arms, he broke out into loud hysterical sobs.

Frightened and distressed beyond measure, Lizzie flung her arms round his neck.

"Oh, father! I'm not ungrateful; indeed I'm not. I know how good you've always been to me, and I know I can never thank you enough."

It was pleasant to him to hear such words, and he was already beginning to feel ashamed of his outburst. He raised his head, and dried his eyes.

"Ah, child," he said, "you don't know what troubles I have had to try me. I wonder I've lasted out so long."

"Poor father!" she exclaimed, vehemently accusing herself of having judged him hastily. "Shall I mix you your nightcap?"

He smiled.

"No, thank you, child; I'm going to give that up. The sooner I wear out the better."

"Don't talk like that," she pleaded earnestly; "what should I do without you?"

"Well enough, I've no doubt," he answered; "I shall leave you something to comfort you."

"Don't, father," she cried; "I can't bear to hear you talk in that way."

"Ah, well, never mind. Go away, now."

She stooped to kiss him, and, as she did so, whispered—

"You will have another talk with Ju, won't you?"

At this pertinacity his wrath began to burn again.

"No, I won't. Don't let me hear another word about her, or I shall be seriously angry with you. I've told you over and over again to go."

He took his pen, dipped it in the ink, and began to write some figures on a piece of paper. Under ordinary circumstances she would have gone long before. But Julia had told her that she was to

leave the very next day, and Lizzie feared that her departure would widen the gulf.

"It would make me so happy," she whispered.

Instantly it flashed into Mr. Porlick's memory that these were the very words with which his wife had tried to cozen him into forgiving his unworthy son. As the thought that he was the victim of a conspiracy struck him, he felt once more the touch of Lizzie's fingers on his arm. It was like the spark to gunpowder.

"Go, I tell you!" he shouted, and thrust his arm out with a violent gesture of dismissal. Before Lizzie could avoid it, the thrust caught her on the shoulder, and, with a little cry, down she went on the floor.

She lay so still for a moment that her father, who had instantly sprung to his feet, stood looking at her in silent horror. Then, just as he was turning towards the bell, she moved and struggled to her feet.

As she did so, she caught sight of the expression on his face—anxiety, fear, horror. With a great effort she summoned a smile.

"It's all right," she said; "I must have caught my feet in the carpet."

"You should be more careful," he answered, with awkward ungraciousness, and sat down again at his writing-table; but his eyes followed her anxiously, as she went out and he returned her "good night" in a tone that was, for him, almost tender.

IX

In spite of Lizzie's pluck and resolution, she had to stop in bed the morning after her fall, and as Julia had breakfast with her in her room, Mr. Porlick went off to business in an extremely bad humour. He was really angry with himself for what he called his "clumsiness," and he was anxious as to its effects on Lizzie. It was, therefore, a great relief to him when he found her able to take her place as usual at the dinner-table. He showed his satisfaction by reproving her vigorously for want of tact.

"You surely could see that I was tired and worried, and that I wanted to be left alone. You ought to have known better than to come buzzing round me like a little hornet. However, you'll know better another time than to startle any one and make them jump."

For this was the explanation of the mishap which Mr. Porlick had ultimately laid before his conscience, and which had been accepted without demur by that august but sleepy tribunal.

"It vexed him, however, to notice that Lizzie not only looked pale but that her eyes were suspiciously red. He guessed at once that this was due to the parting from Julia. Still, the great thing was to have got rid of his rebellious niece, and he

determined to see that the friendship between them came to an end forthwith.

Accordingly, after prayers, he said, with his most genial smile—

"Lizzie, I think I'll have a nightcap to-night."

"All right, father," she said, with an answering smile; "I'll come in as I go up to bed."

She found him in his usual place at the pedestal table, with two or three accounts open and a piece of paper in front of him on which he was making notes. As soon as he saw her, he took out a little packet from a drawer, and handed it to her.

"There," he said, "I don't give many gimcrack presents. It'll be all the better for you some day that I don't. By the way," he added, as a sudden idea struck him, "when's your birthday?"

"The tenth of next month."

"Well, here's your present a little before time—none the worse for that, eh?"

And his smile was simply bewitching, for that happy thought had saved him half a sovereign.

She opened the packet and took out a pretty little gun-metal brooch, ornamented with a modest turquoise.

"How sweet!" she cried, and kissed him warmly; "and how good of you to think of it!"

"Ah, child," he said—it was his nearest approach to a word of endearment—"you don't understand a father's feelings—you can't. I don't blame you. He has constantly to put up with being misunderstood. Now give me the stuff, and take yourself off. I believe you're fond of me in a way."

"Oh, father dear," cried Lizzie, "you know I love you dearly."

"Ah, it's easy to talk like that, but if I had to

ask you to do anything that you thought hard or unreasonable, your love wouldn't take you very far on the road."

"I hope it would take me further than you seem to think," said Lizzie, quietly.

"We'll soon see that," exclaimed Mr. Porlick. "You're very fond of Julia, are you not?"

As he spoke, he looked at her searchingly.

She turned a shade paler, and her eyes met his beseechingly, as though she feared and yet foresaw what he was about to ask.

"Yes," she said, "indeed I am."

"Do you love her better than you love me?"

"No, of course not: you are my father."

A shade of satisfaction crossed Mr. Porlick's face.

"I wish you to break with her, altogether."

His eyes devoured her. Her own, she cast down as she tried to make up her mind.

"I can't make a promise, father," she said at last; "if I did, I don't know whether I could keep it."

She expected an outburst of wrath. Instead, Mr. Porlick only leaned his head on his hand and sighed.

"I thought as much," he said quite quietly. Then, after a pause, "Mix the nightcap, child, and go to bed; you look tired."

She brought him the tumbler, and kissed him good-night.

"I will see as little as possible of her," she whispered.

"Good little woman," he said, and patted her cheek.

It was more than he had expected, and he had made up his mind not to quarrel with Lizzie.



X

MR. PORLICK resigned his post of treasurer and his membership of the Orphanage committee "as a protest," he wrote, "against the lax and unbusinesslike manner in which its affairs are being administered and the money subscribed by the charitable public expended." He enclosed his own subscription for the next quarter which was close at hand, but intimated that this would be the last cheque they would receive from him. He also gave up his seat at the Congregational chapel, and announced his intention of trying the Presbyterians.

The withdrawal of his support from the Orphanage was really a blow aimed at Julia. She had foreseen it from the first, but it placed her in a very difficult position. Her efforts had, it is true, already secured an increase of some fifty pounds in the annual subscriptions, but on the strength of it, two fresh cases had been admitted. Her salary had been paid out of her uncle's subscription. Now, it was not easy to see how the loss was to be made good. Besides, the forty pounds, plus commission, which had been enough for pocket-money when she was living at Goldcroft would be a sad pittance now that she must find board and lodging for herself. After paying Len's debts she had only twelve

pounds left of her savings, and she was loth to break in upon this slender capital.

She had, of course, told Lizzie immediately all that passed at the interview between her uncle and herself. And on the morning after Lizzie's unsuccessful intervention, they had another long talk. They both agreed that the best thing would be for Julia to stay, at any rate, for a few days with the Becktons while she made up her mind as to her future course.

"Remember, Ju," said Lizzie, "I shall always look on you as my sister, and if you ever want anything I could lend you, and are too proud to tell me, it will cut me to the quick. I would ask you in a minute."

"All right, Liz dear; I won't starve till I've given you a chance," Julia answered, as she kissed good-bye.

Then came Mr. Porlick's command. Lizzie had a sleepless night, and looked such a deplorable object at breakfast that he could not help noticing it. As usual, reproof was the nearest approach he could make to sympathy.

"Silly child," he said, as he rose to leave the room, "if you were old-fashioned enough to do what the Bible says—love, honour, and obey your father—you wouldn't be worrying yourself and spoiling your rest."

"I do try, father," she said earnestly, "and I don't need the Bible to tell me to love you. I'm going to say good-bye to Julia to-day; and I won't go to see her again till you tell me I may. I may write to her sometimes, and I dare say I shall hear about her indirectly. I don't want to do anything secretly."

"Well, I suppose fathers must be satisfied nowadays with what they can get in the way of obedience," said Mr. Porlick, with an affected ungraciousness that hardly concealed his real gratification.

"She's worth the lot twice over," he said to himself, as he went out.

Both Julia and Mrs. Beckton were surprised and horrified when Lizzie presented herself at Camden Town with woe-begone countenance about eleven o'clock. She had come over in a cab which waited outside to take her back. She asked to see Julia, and Mrs. Beckton at once made as if she would leave the room.

"No, Winifred; don't go," said Lizzie. "I've brought bad news, and you had better hear it. Ju dear, I don't know how to tell you. Father is so upset over his quarrel with you. He thinks I take your part against him, and it evidently makes him miserable. I tried so hard to get him to let me make peace; but he wouldn't hear of it. Then he said I was to break altogether with you. At first I said I couldn't do that; but he seemed so unhappy I couldn't bear to see him. So I told him I must write and communicate with you indirectly, but that after to-day I wouldn't come to see you till he told me I might."

Julia heard her in silence. It was just what she might have expected, she told herself, but it did not seem any the less hard for that. Why should she be treated as an outcast when, as far as she could see, she had committed no single fault? How much better, she thought, for both Len and her if they had never come to London at all. It might

have been a struggle, but by this time the worst of it would probably have been over. Now his career was practically ruined, and she had hardly made a beginning.

But a glance at Lizzie's mournful face recalled her to the immediate present. The first thing to do was to comfort her.

"Never mind, Liz dear," she said; "it isn't your fault. If we can write, and talk to each other through Winifred, it won't be so bad; and some day, perhaps, you may be able to make peace, after all."

At this last saying the visitor brightened.

"Oh, if I could!" she cried. "It is such a pity. Father doesn't understand you, and I don't think you either of you quite understand him. I know he seems harsh, and says uncomfortable things sometimes; but I believe he's really what Dr. Burnyat calls 'a bundle of nerves,' and when he's overworked he gets irritable. I don't think he can help it. And he does things on the spur of the moment, and is sorry afterwards—I am sure he is. But he's always thinking of other people; he told me so himself, and I believe it's perfectly true. If he didn't work so hard I'm sure he would be quite different. But he's always been so good to me."

"Yes, I believe he has," said Julia, with a great effort; and Lizzie gave her hand a grateful squeeze.

"Have you made any plans yet?" asked the visitor.

"I hadn't till an hour ago," answered Julia; "then this came."

And she handed over a letter, which Lizzie took eagerly and read.

"Ennerdale.

"DEAR MISS HASTINGS,

"I have just had a long and, I am sorry to say, painful conversation with your uncle, in the course of which he has told me of his intention to give up all connection with the Orphanage, and to discontinue his subscription. I am specially grieved to find that he—most unjustly, as I and the rest of the committee consider—blames you for your conduct in the matter; and I was most grieved of all to hear that he has actually requested you to leave Goldcroft. I am sure you will not think it impertinent if, under these circumstances, and in the light of certain expressions he used, I have been considering whether we could—as we would most gladly—be of any service to you. The salary you receive from the Orphanage is, of course, quite insufficient for your support; but, if supplemented, it might, perhaps, still be useful. Curiously enough, or rather, I should say, providentially—for I am old-fashioned enough to believe in a divine ordering of our lives—I have just heard of a vacant post that might possibly suit you. The position is that of private secretary to a lady who is connected with literature, or ambitious of forming such a connection. Shorthand and typing, though a recommendation, are not indispensable. She would generally require her secretary three days a week, from ten-thirty to five. For this she would give, to a suitable person, sixty pounds a year. I see no reason why you should not take this place, and retain your post of secretary to the Orphanage—at any rate, for the present. I ought to add that by this morning's first post I received ten ten-pound notes enclosed in a piece of paper, on which was written, in a hand

strange to me, 'For the Orphanage. To be applied towards the expenses of the necessary office work.' I think I may say this will assure your secretarial position for a couple of years at least.

"The name and address of the lady to whom I have referred are—

"Mrs. Haydeck Browne,
"12, Ulster Court,
"S. Kensington.

"I remain, dear Miss Hastings,
"Yours very sincerely,
"JAMES POSTE CARTWRIGHT."

"Oh, I *am* glad!" exclaimed Lizzie. "You could manage on a hundred pounds a year, couldn't you? If not——"

"I'll send you begging letters," said Julia, with a smile. "But Mrs. Haydeck Browne may have a word to say in the matter. My shorthand is very poor, and my typing not much better."

From the discussion of details they soon came back to the inevitable separation. Mrs. Beckton did her best to comfort them by pointing out how much worse things might have been. It was rather like reminding Rachel that King Herod might have demanded her boys and girls as well as her babes, and neither Julia nor Lizzie when they parted looked very heroic.

XI

It sometimes occurred to Mr. Porlick, as one of the deeper mysteries of life, that while Providence had blessed him with such wonderful and unbroken good fortune in all that lay outside his home, within it he had met with insolent or cowardly insubordination and the blackest ingratitude. The immediate cause of this strange contrast was, of course, plain enough. In business affairs Providence worked through the agency of Josiah Porlick as the predominating factor, whereas in domestic matters the result was largely dependent on other and sadly inferior agents. "But why," he asked himself—this was really a mystery—"why should he have been afflicted with such a family?" Jane, her husband, and their children—his blood boiled as he thought of them. Then his wife—"poor creature," he often called her; but the adjective was not the unspoken one in his mind. And his children! One, indeed, was worthy of her father, and her life had been wrecked because he had allowed himself to be overruled by her mother. But the rest! John, a fugitive from justice; Ellen, cold, opinionated, and often impertinent; Herbert, obstinate and secretive, already showing an assertiveness that needed constant repression; and now there was Hugh!

It had always been a grievance with Mr. Porlick

that his youngest child seemed to have nothing in common with his father's side of the family. Nor, indeed, did he resemble his mother. He was tall for his seventeen years, and slightly built, but wiry and agile. He was passionately fond of almost all games, and excelled at most, whereas Mr. Porlick regarded them all, except perhaps whist, with contempt and grim disapproval. Till his seventeenth birthday Hugh had attended a large day school in Ealing, but had then been removed and sent to a commercial institute in the city, where he was to be trained for business. So his father had ordained, without paying the slightest attention to the boy's wishes. Not that Hugh had any hesitation in announcing them. An outdoor life of adventure was the object of his ambition. No chain, he often declared to Lizzie, should ever bind him to a dirty desk in a stuffy office. She counselled submission, at any rate, for a time, but she sympathized with his longings. Perhaps the cabined, crippled life she had led for so many years, with the memory of the freedom and the fun of the days before her accident, made her quick to understand the boy's feelings. To Mr. Porlick they were only intelligible on his favourite theory of deliberate and obstinate contrariety.

"No member of my family," he declared, during one of his arguments with Hugh, "ever has been, or ever will be, encouraged to a life of vagabondage. They shall be decent, industrious, virtuous citizens, or they shall cease to belong to my household."

"It's no good, Liz," said Hugh, afterwards, when his father had left the room; "the governor may talk as he likes. I'm not going to spend the best of

my life adding up beastly tots, and trying all I know to haggle my neighbours into the workhouse."

Of late, relations between father and son had grown more and more strained. Hugh lacked what his brothers and sisters possessed—the gift of silence. When Mr. Porlick's expressive countenance flew its worst danger signals, they only served to excite Hugh. When Mr. Porlick shouted, Hugh returned a very creditable echo; when he argued, Hugh joyfully accepted the challenge.

A crisis was reached when Mr. Porlick received a letter from the college where Hugh was being trained for business life, telling him that his son had failed to obtain a leaving certificate.

Hugh had already reached home when his father arrived, but he contrived to be two or three minutes late for dinner, of itself a high misdemeanour.

Contrary to his usual habit when displeased, Mr. Porlick did not maintain a gloomy and awful silence. Perhaps he knew that such a proceeding would not in the least overawe his irreverent son. Instead, he began, the moment they sat down, while, in fact, the girl was taking off the covers.

"Well, sir, I hope you are pleased with yourself. A nice letter I've just had from your principal. 'Careless,' 'lack of concentration,' 'superficial.' Fancy *my* son having such epithets applied to him; ay, and a good deal within the truth, I know. Of course Mr. Sutherland wished to spare my feelings as far as possible. Hopelessly idle and irreclaimably frivolous—that would be nearer the mark."

Hugh said nothing, but his cheek flushed scarlet, and Lizzie, who knew the meaning of the flush, pushed a hassock hard against his feet.

"For very shame's sake," continued Mr. Porlick,

cutting fiercely at his meat, "I should have thought even *you* would have made some small effort to maintain the family credit; or, if that consideration has no weight with you, then, at least, your own self-interest might have urged you to try and satisfy my very moderate demands."

Watching under his half-closed eyelids, he distinctly saw a smile curling his son's lips. It was not a very pronounced smile, but to him it seemed more provocative than a shout of laughter.

"Ah, you may smile, but you shall smart," he cried; and this time the maid smiled, for she thought he was threatening his son with personal chastisement.

Unluckily, Hugh caught the expression on her face, and instantly Lizzie's hassock lost its restraining power.

"I wish you wouldn't talk nonsense, sir," he drawled. Mr. Porlick hated what he called the affectation of deliberate speech. Hugh had often answered back when reproved by his father, but never with such open and hardy defiance.

Mr. Porlick gave a little gasp. This was more than he had expected. If there was to be an open rupture, he would rather have had the scene in his study. Lizzie was a disturbing element. Herbert did not count. He never interfered in such affairs, but pursued his own way, and kept his own counsel. Still, there was the servant, and, rude as he habitually was to his dependents, he was very sensitive to their opinions. So, after a slight pause, he broke out—

"Nonsense—eh? That's the way you address your father, is it? Leave the room this moment!"

Obedient to a sign from Lizzie, the servant had

quietly disappeared. Lizzie herself was about to speak, but Hugh was too quick for her.

"I shan't do anything of the kind," he said, still in the same drawl; and, as he spoke, he reached over and helped himself to potatoes from a dish close to his father's left arm.

The purple badge of fury was now plain on Mr. Porlick's cheek, but he knew that for the time he was beaten. Hugh was a strong, well-set-up young fellow, and could not be ejected like a nursery criminal. His father, therefore, relapsed into silence, which was practically unbroken till the meal was finished. Hugh, indeed, made two or three attempts to open conversation with Herbert and Lizzie, but the former made no reply at all, while Lizzie answered in a whisper, and accompanied her answer with a significant little shake of the head. This evidence of sympathy with their father—so Mr. Porlick interpreted their conduct—strengthened his resolution to enforce his authority on the spot.

As he finished the last drain of coffee in his cup, he looked up sharply, and addressed Hugh again, more roughly than before.

"Now, then, are you going to do what I told you?"

"Eh, what did you say?" said Hugh, taken aback by the suddenness of the attack.

"You know well enough," answered his father, with rough contempt. "Go out of the room."

Hugh got up slowly, walked to the fireplace, and assumed Mr. Porlick's characteristic attitude—hands in his pockets, legs straddled. Herbert and Lizzie watched him in astonishment. It was evidently not any conscious mimicry, but the boy

seemed suddenly transformed into the likeness of his father—that boy who had hitherto seemed so utterly different. The frown upon his forehead was surely Mr. Porlick's own, but the eyes it shadowed were bolder and braver.

"If I go at all, I go for good," he said at last, after a long and sinister pause.

Mr. Porlick had tried to meet that defiant gaze, but his eyes dropped. He too was astonished.

"If you don't go, I'll have you put out," he blustered, spurring his voice to passion-point.

"Do it then," said Hugh, spreading his legs another inch or two, and thrusting his hands deeper in his pockets.

There was another pause, during which Lizzie got up, and, walking up to Hugh, whispered in his ear.

"Come away, Lizzie!" cried her father; "have nothing to do with him. I wonder God's curse doesn't strike him—it will soon."

"It did," said Hugh, "the day I was born your son."

Herbert got up and shook the crumbs from his coat. Then he rang the bell.

"What's that for? What do you want?" began Mr. Porlick and Lizzie together; but the door was opened with suspicious quickness and cut them short.

"Just see if you can find the clothes-brush, Annie," said Herbert.

Hugh burst out laughing.

"Good old Bert," he exclaimed, "to prick our heroics like that. Look here, father, I'm sorry I said that last thing. It was going a bit too far, but you worked me up."

A gleam of satisfaction lit up Mr. Porlick's eyes, that were lifted now readily enough.

"Weakening," he said to himself. Then aloud—"If you go upstairs at once to your room, stay there till prayers, and bring down with you a humble letter of apology, I will consider what course to adopt."

Again Hugh laughed—a very different laugh this time.

"How very kind of you!" he said. "I suppose I ought to feel extremely grateful, but somehow I don't. Well, good night and good-bye, father."

And he held out his hand.

But Mr. Porlick turned his back on his son, and left the room.



BOOK V

I

THE family circle at Goldcroft was constantly shrinking. John, Mrs. Porlick, Ellen, and Hugh had gone, one after another, and only three were left. Hugh had disappeared the day after the quarrel with his father. Lizzie tried her hardest to make peace; but the material she had to work upon was too intractable, and she could not even find out what the boy's plans were. All she could do was to fill his purse, which she did to the emptying of her own. Mr. Porlick absolutely refused to discuss the matter, and sternly forbade the mention of his name.

The next to go was Herbert, but his departure was not accompanied by any quarrel. The truth was, Mr. Porlick was secretly a little afraid of his second son. Herbert took after his father in temper and disposition, and—to a certain extent—in ability also. He had not, it is true, the same rapidity in calculation, or the same power of quickly mastering a mass of complicated detail; but, on the other hand, he already showed a dogged persistence in pursuing any object upon which he had set his mind, that his father noted with respect, and soon with a certain feeling of apprehension. There was something, too, in his absolute indifference to sentiment in business matters that sometimes gave Mr.

Porlick a passing qualm. "I believe the fellow would give his father the sack without a moment's hesitation, if he thought he could fill his place," he said to himself one night in the train, as he watched, from under half-closed lids, his heavy-featured, dull-eyed son.

At the same time, to do Mr. Porlick justice, he was quick to recognize Herbert's great business capacity. He moved him up from post to post with a celerity that greatly astonished the older members of his staff. And then, about three months after Hugh's disappearance, he called Herbert into his Baker Street sanctum, with a certain solemnity that indicated important business.

"Shut the door, Herbert—better lock it—I don't want to be disturbed," so he commenced the conversation.

Herbert obeyed, wondering what was in the air, but wearing his usual impenetrable mask.

"Now, Herbert," began his father, "you haven't been in the business very long, but I must say you have given me very considerable satisfaction. You have performed comparatively insignificant duties with punctuality and intelligence, and I intend now to commit much more important ones to your care. You know we have a branch at Manchester?"

Mr. Porlick paused for a reply.

"Yes," answered Herbert, "corner of Abbot Street—runs down to Firmin's Lane."

"How do you know that?" asked Mr. Porlick, sharply.

"I stayed a night in Manchester on my last holiday."

"And did you go over the Abbot Street place?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"It never occurred to me. I suppose the subject never arose."

"H'm! What did you think of Gardiner?"

"So-so."

"One of the best men we've got. What's amiss with him?"

"Too old."

"He's not much over sixty. He's been working for me thirty years."

"Time he took a rest, then," said Herbert, with a dry little laugh.

"Well, I'm going to send you to be under him for a year. Then, if you show yourself fit for the place, I shall put a price on the business there, and let you take it over, paying me off by instalments. If you want capital, I'll lend you anything in reason at four per cent. if you can show me a fair chance of your being able to earn it. If you put your back into the job, you ought to double the takings in a couple of years."

"When shall I start?"

"As soon as you like."

"Next Monday?"

This readiness to be off and away, almost at a moment's notice, seemed not altogether pleasing to Mr. Porlick.

"You don't take much thought for my comfort," he remarked irritably. "How do you think I am to find a substitute for you in twenty-four hours?"

"Oh, I'm not in any hurry. I thought you wanted me to go as soon as possible."

"There's no *want* about it. I'm not sending you there for my good, but for your own, and most

young fellows of your age and position would feel and show a little common gratitude."

"I'm much obliged to you, but I thought you preferred to have things treated on a business basis," answered Herbert; and his father turned to his letters with a grunt.

Herbert's settlement in Manchester left only Lizzie and her father to share the breakfast and the dining table. For some time now she had taken up the duties of housekeeping, and devoted herself absolutely to ministering to his comfort. More and more he fell into the way of discussing with her his private affairs, and she was amazed to find the amount of his rapidly increasing fortune.

"Why, father," she said one day when she had been making out, from his dictation, a list of his American railway securities, "you must be nearly a millionaire!"

He looked up sharply; then said, after a moment's pause—

"Don't talk nonsense. It's a far cry from fifty thousand pounds to a million."



II

TRUE to his threat, Mr. Porlick soon put upon the market an improved Newdigate. It was, indeed, a race between him and Beckton, which his capital and the fiery energy he put into all his business concerns, enabled him to win. But he was by no means satisfied with his success. When, a few weeks later he discovered that a similar bolt was being manufactured by Beckton and Gill, he immediately put the matter into his son-in-law's hands. His indignation knew no bounds.

"Rogues, ruffians, and swindlers, that's what they are!" he exclaimed. "It's a monstrous shame they can't be clapped into prison! If a fellow steals a handkerchief from me, in he goes! But if he steals an invention for which I've paid hard cash, it isn't a crime at all. There's a pretty state of things!"

The result of Mr. Porlick's consultation with his solicitor soon appeared in a writ issued against Beckton and Gill, claiming an injunction and damages for an infringement of the original Newdigate patent.

It was with great difficulty that Beckton could manage to defend the action, for his capital, never very large, had been almost exhausted in manufacturing the new bolt. As it was, he had to entrust

his case to a junior counsel, and—worse still—he could not afford a really good expert witness. Mr. Porlick, on the other hand, was represented by the pick of the patent bar, backed by two of the best experts. The case was heard by Mr. Justice Watson, the judge of whom it was said that his true mission in life was to keep the Court of Appeal well occupied.

During the preliminary stages of the action Mr. Porlick had been alarmed and angered by the cautious opinions of his junior counsel. They did not, however, shake his resolve to fight the matter out, but only made him more determined to win, if money could ensure it. For, parsimonious as he was in his domestic affairs, and as to wages and salaries, he would yet spend money like water when he judged it necessary for the protection of his business interests, or when his combative instincts were fairly roused. In the present case both these motives operated. He detested Beckton, and the idea of crushing him was very sweet, while the bolt was a property well worth fighting for. Besides, his triumph in the matter of "Brain-bran" had whetted his appetite for the law courts.

After a trial lasting three days, judgment was delivered for the plaintiff, with costs, and an account was ordered against Beckton and Gill of the new bolts sold by them. As the parties left the court, the great Q.C. turned to his exultant client—

"If you'll take my advice, Mr. Porlick, you'll settle terms with the other side. We're safe to be upset in the Court above, if they take it there. It was a shocking bad judgment."

This suggestion, however, Mr. Porlick absolutely refused to entertain for a single moment, though it was strenuously supported by the "heavy" junior, who had drafted his pleadings, and also by his solicitor. The only practical result was that he quarrelled fiercely with his son-in-law, whom he accused of having allowed himself to be approached by Beckton. Thereupon Albert, who had already suffered many things during the progress of the action, asked him to place his affairs in the hands of another firm; and, as Ellen naturally took her husband's part, Mr. Porlick's family circle was still further narrowed.

Events proved the worldly wisdom of his policy, for Beckton found it impossible to raise the funds for an appeal, though he, too, was advised that it would probably succeed. As it was, his firm was swamped by the costs of the trial, and, after a gallant struggle, he was compelled to seek the assistance of the Bankruptcy Court.

These were sad days for Lizzie. Even her warm heart and fertile charity were sometimes hard put to for explanations and excuses. Alike in his anxiety and in his triumph her father was well-nigh insupportable. Not satisfied with denouncing the wickedness of Beckton himself, he would lengthen meal after meal with the bitterest invectives against Mrs. Beckton, Julia and Len, and Ellen and Albert. But, whatever he may have suspected, he never asked whether Lizzie still kept up communication with her cousins. The truth was that, while he fully intended that she should be kept informed of their misdeeds, he had also definitely determined not to quarrel with his favourite child. He asked for no expression of

agreement; her silence was enough—he chose to assume her sympathy.

As a matter of fact, since the action had been fairly launched, Julia had ceased writing direct to Lizzie and contented herself with sending messages by Mrs. Beckton. And even Winifred wrote at longer intervals and with a certain constraint against which she struggled vigorously, but without entire success. Lizzie's letters were more frequent, but they too were obviously written under difficulties. There were frequent references in them to her father's state of health, and it needed no great discernment to see that this was her tacit apology for him.

"Poor father," she wrote, on the eve of the trial, "is, I am sure, more out of health than he recognizes. His appetite has fallen off—sometimes he hardly eats any breakfast at all, and he is getting much thinner. His sleep, too, is broken, and the other night I heard him walking about for more than an hour. If he were only himself, things would be very different."

The last words were underlined, and both Winifred and Julia understood what she meant.

III

Lizzie's account of her father's state of health was not in the least exaggerated. For some time he had himself become conscious that his appetite was failing. Even as a young man he had been liable, at long intervals, to somewhat severe attacks of indigestion, which he had treated, after the heroic fashion of our ancestors, with blue pill and black draught. In middle life the weakness seemed to have disappeared, but it now returned in a more acute form, and with a frequency that steadily increased. Intensely nervous, and with little fortitude in bearing pain, his indisposition, whenever it occurred, became immediately obvious to every one in the house. Lizzie urged him to see Dr. Burnyat, but the advice was rejected with indignant scorn. Instead, he adopted in succession a number of hygienic fads of which he had heard or read. Stale bread, hot water, fruit-salt, charcoal, cardialgic lozenges, no meat, all meat, an infusion of horse-radish in place of tea and coffee—these were only some of his experiments, and the worst of it was that he insisted on Lizzie sharing them. Then he discovered that by taking his whisky nightcap before dinner instead of after, he came to the meal with more zest; but without his nightcap he now found that he often lay awake for a long time.

Gradually, therefore, he fell into the habit of taking his whisky twice a day. Indeed, it soon came to three times, for a severe attack of pain in the middle of the day suggested to him the advisability of keeping a bottle in his cupboard at Baker Street.

So things went on till one night, a week or two before the trial of the action. Lizzie had mixed his nightcap, kissed him good-night, and gone to bed. She used to bring the whisky upstairs in a glass, from a bottle which she kept in the dining-room sideboard. As soon as he heard her bedroom door locked he opened a drawer in his writing-table, and took out another bottle. He had bought at a sale twelve dozen prime Scotch whisky—a great bargain—and he kept the key of the cellar, and gave the bottles to Lizzie as she required them for his evening glass. The bottles that he emptied by his private indulgences he replaced in the cellar when empty, with his own hand. The hot-water jug was on his table now, but he used its contents only sparingly as he mixed another large tumblerful, slowly drank off the contents, and leaned back in his chair.

After a time he heard a door open upstairs, and then the creaking of the stairs. It flashed into his mind that Lizzie was coming down to his room. She must not see the bottle on the table. He sprang to his feet, put the cork in with unsteady fingers, and walked across the room towards the cupboard. Twice he stumbled against the furniture, and he found no small difficulty in locking and bolting the cupboard. As he did so he heard the steps go down towards the kitchen, and knew that it had been a false alarm.

In coming back to his chair he passed the mirror

that stood over the mantel-piece. Without looking for it he caught the reflection of his own figure. He regarded it stupidly for a minute or so, supporting himself on the back of a chair. Then, shaking his head with owlish solemnity, he ejaculated, "Drunk, drunk as a lord!"

He sank into his armchair, still wagging his head and repeating softly to himself, "Drunk, quite drunk!" till he fell asleep.

He woke up with a start and a disagreeable feeling that something was wrong. He often woke in the night with the dull, wearing pain that he called "indigestion." He was conscious of it now, but it did not account for the uncanny feeling that disconcerted him. Then he saw the gaslight looking a dirty yellow, and, turning to the window, the faint light of the morning quivering on the frayed edge of a cloudy sky. He sprang up in dismay. He ought to have been in bed hours ago. Such a thing had never occurred to him before!

He went to the window, opened it softly, and looked out. He still felt confused and unable to recall the incidents that had led up to this strange occurrence. The window looked on the road, and through a gap in the trees he could see the opposite pavement for some thirty or forty yards. About midway stood a lamp-post, the light still burning, though, like his own lamp, it wore a belated, dissipated appearance. Against this post leaned a man, his hat awry, his inverness cape muddy and out of place, showing a glimpse of a white shirt-front—altogether a draggled, dishevelled, miserable object. "Drunk!" said Mr. Porlick to himself, in a whispered tone of reprobation—"disgustingly drunk."

And instantly, as when, at the touch of the electric wizard, some elaborate design, till then dark, blazes into light from end to end, the events of the preceding hours rose before him clear and precise, even to the minutest detail. The picture of himself that he had seen in the glass stood out horribly distinct. His own ejaculation rang again in his ears. What! He, Josiah Porlick, on the level of that disgusting creature he had just seen leaning against the lamp-post! No—it should never be; and, walking steadily to the cupboard, he opened it, took the bottle, still half full, carried it to the window, pulled out the cork, and poured the contents on the beds below. Then he replaced the empty bottle, turned off the gas, and went very softly to his bedroom.

IV

It was with mingled feelings of surprise, dismay, and anger that Mr. Porlick found how difficult was the task he had set himself. It seemed almost incredible that a habit acquired so late in life should in a few months have secured so firm a hold upon him. The lack of his wonted stimulant appeared to leave him a helpless prey to indigestion and insomnia, with nerves intensely sensitive and irritable; but pride, as well as principle, was enlisted in the struggle, and the strength of his will had always been one of his boasts. He tried no half measures. When dinner was over, the next evening, he announced to Lizzie his intention of giving up his "nightcap," and when she suggested that he should have it occasionally, he reiterated his decision with such wrathful vehemence that she was glad to drop the subject. For quite a fortnight, indeed, he was almost unbearable, and even Lizzie seemed to have lost her power of soothing and managing him, for there was nothing of the grace of repentance about his good resolve. He was furious at the thought of his abasement, and he had little difficulty in fixing the responsibility on an outsider.

"That old fool, Burnyat," he said to himself—"though I'm not sure that he isn't more knave than

fool—it was all his doing. I suppose he reckoned I should be sure to fall into his hands at last. Well, he's made a mistake this time, at any rate. I'll take good care the butchers don't get hold of me."

Then came the trial and the judgment in his favour. By this time the worst of the battle against temptation was over, and his legal victory he welcomed as an endorsement from on high of his conduct. He derived great satisfaction, too, from the constant comparisons he instituted between the helpless victims of intemperance and a man betrayed by outside influence into temporary excess, but strong enough to assert himself and vindicate his manhood. And then, pat upon his victory in the law courts, came another and still more signal indication of Heaven's approval.

It came in the form of a letter bearing the Canadian post-mark, the writing-paper stamped with the name of a Toronto firm of lawyers.

"HORACE B. TEMPLEMAN.
"WILLIAM F. LYON.

"To JOSIAH PORLICK, ESQ.,
"Baker Street, London, England.

"DEAR SIR,

"We regret to have to announce to you the death of Mr. John Gold, as he called himself, late of this city, who was, we understand, your eldest son. He caught a severe chill about a fortnight ago, from the effects of which he never recovered. We have acted as his legal advisers in some small matters, and he had made an appointment with us for the day before his decease, in order to execute his will. He was engaged to be married to a young lady—Miss Hetty Lambe, of 66, London Street—whose

father is an old friend of mine, and a gentleman of excellent standing. Your son's desire was, he told me, to make some provision for her in the event of anything happening to him. His estate, according to a rough pencil schedule which he sent me when he made the appointment, and which I have since verified as correct, consists of $475 cash standing to his credit in the Imperial Bank, and a hundred and twenty $40 shares in the Klingholt Steel Manufacturing Co., which he bought on a fall, but which have lately risen in the market, and would now certainly realize more than $4000. As his next of kin, you are, of course, entitled at law to the whole of his personal—in the present case the only—estate. We shall be glad to have your early instructions in the matter.

"Yours faithfully,

"HORACE B. TEMPLEMAN."

This letter came as a shock upon Mr. Porlick. It cannot, however, be truthfully said that he felt any real sorrow over his son's death; nor did he pretend to. "The best thing that could have happened," he said to himself. "He won't be able to disgrace me or himself either any more now. He always was a bad egg." On the other hand, the thought of the thousand pounds coming into his pocket after all, not only undiminished, but actually increased, afforded him a joy that fell not far short of rapture. For it was not merely the recovery of what he had given up for lost—it was the seal and sign of Heaven's approval that brought to his soul an unwonted exaltation. Nor did even this exhaust the fulness of his joy. The sweetest drop in his cup of blessing was the thought that now, after

all, he had triumphed over his wife. No longer would he be tormented by the rankling thought that the poor feeble creature had, in the very hour of her extreme weakness, succeeded in besting him. Hitherto it had seemed to him as though, in some inscrutable manner, she had secured the alliance of the unseen powers. Now it was suddenly and plainly demonstrated that after all it was he for whom the stars in their courses had been fighting. His faith, which had sometimes been sorely tried, recovered its balance with a spring. Once more he felt all his old amazement and anger at the thought that any one could seriously doubt the predominance of Eternal Justice.

One difficulty, however, oppressed him—the necessity of telling Lizzie. The ascendancy of the meek over the strong was, perhaps, never more strikingly exemplified than in the relations which now existed between this father and daughter. The only one of his children who had never set her will against his, it was natural that she should be his favourite. What seemed strange, even in his own eyes, was a curious feeling of something almost like awe that now and again surprised him in her presence. Her faith in him and his goodness was the one form of criticism to which he was still susceptible. Religion and its hopes, aspirations, struggles, and joys were so truly part of her very life that she often spoke of them to him; and the way in which she assumed his familiarity with them and deferred to his larger knowledge and wider experience, though it pleased him at the moment, seemed to breed a strange after-growth of misgiving and discomfort. He knew that she was absolutely incapable of pretence, and yet he realized that in

the most intimate of her joys and sorrows he had no part or lot, and the thought not only stung, but alarmed him. For the first time in his life he was beginning to be afraid of his loneliness, of which he had hitherto been so proud; and now, between him and the one for whom he felt the warmest love of his life, a great gulf seemed to be opening. This was the thought that haunted him till it became an obsession, and made his behaviour to Lizzie a constant marvel to all who knew him.

The Toronto letter had come by the early morning post, and he read it before breakfast, but said nothing to Lizzie about it during the meal. She noticed that he was silent and preoccupied, and set it down to business worries. All through the day he found one thought constantly recurring—how should he tell the news to Lizzie? He felt almost like a man upon his trial, who has to consider how he shall shape his defence.

Since he had given up his "nightcaps" it had come to be a regular institution that Lizzie should sit with him in his study for the half hour before she went to bed. She filled his pipe or rolled his cigarette, and then talked or listened, as his mood suggested.

On this particular night he seemed out of sorts and ill at ease. She started two or three indifferent subjects of conversation, but he made scarcely any response, until—resourceful as she was—there was a considerable pause.

He broke it by suddenly remarking, with an abruptness that sounded almost savage—

"Your brother John's dead."

"Father!" cried Lizzie, greatly shocked—"dead?"

"Yes; I had a letter to-day from Toronto, but I'll read it to you another time, when you can control yourself."

This was said in allusion to the fact that the tears were stealing down her cheeks.

"Please read it now," she said; "it is so sudden and so sad. Poor John!"

Mr. Porlick frowned. The tone of pity grated on his ears, for it seemed to him as though the pity were, in this case, akin to reproach. Then he looked hard at Lizzie, and his brow cleared.

"Sad, indeed," he said gravely; "but we must accept the dispensations of Providence."

As he spoke he took out the letter and read it aloud, only omitting the reference to John's engagement.

When he had finished he looked across at his daughter.

"Yes, it's true what the old book says—'The way of transgressors is hard.'"

"But, father dear!" she exclaimed, "I'm sure he repented. Do you know," she added eagerly, "I very often dream about mother, and twice last week I saw her smiling. Perhaps it was because she has her boy back again. It was just that kind of smile."

Mr. Porlick sprang up, and began hastily arranging the papers on his desk.

"Go to bed at once," he said irritably; "you worry me, when you see how upset I am. I wish you wouldn't have those ridiculous dreams; you'll become downright hysterical if you don't take care. *I* never have dreams like that. There, there, that'll do. Give me a kiss and go to bed."



V

A STRIKING instance of the very real, though silent, deference which Mr. Porlick now paid to his favourite child was the absence of any reference in his conversations with her to the Beckton lawsuit. While it was actually in progress he had found it impossible to refrain from denouncing the enemy; but, after the first explosions of triumph, he had constrained himself to silence. As neither Winifred nor Julia said a word about the straits to which Beckton was reduced, Lizzie would have remained in ignorance of the bankruptcy but for a visit from Herbert, who occasionally came to London on business. His appointment had proved a great success. Before six months had elapsed Mr. Porlick had found a pretext for getting rid of Gardiner. He had installed his son in the vacant place, and already signs of progress were apparent.

"The governor looks something awful, but he seems in fine feather, too," said Herbert, after dinner, when Mr. Porlick had gone upstairs.

"Yes," answered Lizzie; "he's very pleased with the way you're getting on at Manchester."

"Oh, I didn't mean that," said he, carelessly. "I'm all right, of course. I believe I could put him

up to a thing or two at Baker Street. He's getting a bit behind the times."

"But even the youngest of us make mistakes sometimes," she quoted, with a smile.

Herbert was not quick to see a joke.

"What does that mean?" he asked. "It sounds as if it were meant to be smart."

"It was one of Mr. Clayton's sayings. I wonder what has become of him."

"Funny you should say that. I met him in Manchester a few weeks ago."

"Did he say what he's doing? Has he got another charge?"

"Not yet, at any rate. He's going to Australia. He's ordered a rest and a sea voyage. He looked pretty bad."

"Poor man!" said Lizzie, with quick sympathy. "Oh, I do wish Ju could have married him!"

"Yes, she's made a mess of it; she'll never get a better chance. I used to think her rather a clever girl, too."

"So she is; you ask Ellen. But it was a question of conscience with her."

"Oh, was it?" and he yawned. "Well, I'm afraid she'll find her conscience rather an expensive luxury. Is she still with the Becktons?"

"Yes, I had a letter from her yesterday."

"I wonder how they manage to keep that house going."

"Why, are things as bad as that?"

"Well, a man doesn't, as a rule, go bankrupt for the fun of it."

"Bankrupt?" cried Lizzie, horror-struck.

"Yes—didn't you know? I must say the governor managed that little business about as well

as it could be done. I know Albert advised him to compromise."

"They've quarrelled over it, somehow," she said sadly.

"Perhaps it's just as well. I don't believe in having relatives for your lawyers. I dare say he was right enough, though, in his law. But the governor knew that Beckton hadn't got money enough to appeal, so he just sat tight, and held his judgment."

"He wouldn't have done that unless he believed he was in the right," she said confidently.

"Oh, I dare say not," said Herbert, with another yawn; "he generally does think himself in the right."

One result of this conversation was a letter from Lizzie to Julia, full of tender reproaches for not letting her know the full extent of the Becktons' troubles.

"You don't understand father as I do," part of it ran, "and I can't wonder. His sense of right and wrong, and abstract justice, is so intensely strong that he is not able to pass over what he thinks a culpable action, even when it has been committed against himself. Of course he may be mistaken in his judgment, and his state of health is responsible for much that people naturally attribute to graver faults of character. I am growing very, very anxious about him. He eats so little, and is getting quite thin. Every now and then he has such a strange, unnatural pallor; it is all I can do not to exclaim when I see him. But to me he is always so kind, and even in manner he grows gentler as he grows older. Oh dear! if only I could put an end to these

miserable misunderstandings, how happy I should be! I pray for it constantly, and often I dream that it has come about; and then I see mother smiling and looking so happy, and now it seems to me as though she is rejoicing over poor John. I believe father is very much affected by his death, though he says very little. The other day, after he had been speaking about his death, he smiled—such a strange smile, as though he could see joy through the sorrow. I am sure if he really understood what you and Mr. Beckton meant, he would look at the matter in quite a different way, and would be dreadfully sorry for all this trouble. Now, I want you to do something for me. I know it's not the least good offering to lend *you* any money. You're dreadfully proud, Ju—as proud in your way as father in his, and a nice time poor little Liz has between you. You know I've more money than I know what to do with, and you know that the thought that you may be suffering for the want of a little is torture to me; but I doubt whether you would tell me, even if you really wanted it. But this, at least, you can do for me. I have put in five five-pound notes. Do be clever and contrive somehow to use them for Winifred or the baby. You can tell her or not, as you think best—*not*, I should say."

And before the end of the letter there came this paragraph:

"Herbert was up for a week-end. He met Mr. Clayton in Manchester. He says Mr. C. is looking very bad, and is going for a long sea voyage. You know I think you were quite right, but I can't help feeling very sorry for both of you. Sometimes I get so impatient because all the strands of life seem

to be in knots, and I long to cut them. But *the other ends* are in God's hand—I know they are—and, after all, threescore years and ten are not a lifetime, whatever your old Huxley and Haeckel may say."

VI

MR. PORLICK'S appetite and strength steadily declined. For a long time he refused to acknowledge even to himself that anything was wrong. The pain he suffered after meals was nothing but indigestion, to which, he declared, he had been more or less subject all his life. As for the loss of weight, that was a positive relief, and the weakness was due to his anxieties and the incompetence of his subordinates, which threw upon his shoulders more than he ought to be called upon to do at his age. He was, however, secretly impressed by Herbert's obviously genuine astonishment when he came up from Manchester after a six months' absence.

"Why, what's the matter, sir?" he exclaimed; "have you been ill?"

"No, thank God, I'm too busy to be ill," said his father; but, as soon as Herbert had left the room, he went to the glass and scrutinized his reflection searchingly.

Lizzie tried to induce him to call in Dr. Burnyat; but he was so vexed at the suggestion that, after two or three attempts, she desisted.

Certain changes in his habits were, however, very significant. He had up to this time been an early riser, and was always at his study-table by a quarter to eight. Now he came down at half-past

eight, the letters were put on the breakfast-table, and he passed all but a few over to Lizzie to read to him during the meal. Then, instead of hurrying off to business the moment breakfast was over, he now retired to his room and locked himself in, a procedure he also adopted after the evening meal. The fact was, sometimes the pain after a meal was terrible, and he could not trust himself under the public eye. Of late he had quietly let morning prayers drop—a strange contrast to the days when punctual attendance was rigorously exacted from children and servants alike. Then he was sadly remiss in the matter of church attendance—another marvellous declension from the days of old. This he excused by alleging the difficulty of finding a church or chapel where a really evangelical ministry was combined with business-like management.

Perhaps the most striking departure from his former habits and customs was his sudden determination to go for an Easter holiday to Bournemouth. Every year he had taken his family away for a few weeks in the summer, generally to Swanage, where he had considerable property. Any other holiday he would never hear of. Now, however, a few days before Good Friday, he announced, as if it were a most ordinary proceeding, his intention of taking a week at the seaside. Lizzie was delighted, for she had watched with growing alarm the threatening symptoms that were obvious to every one except, apparently, Mr. Porlick himself.

"I feel a bit run down," he admitted; and added, "A change of air is worth all the chemists' shops in the kingdom."

The sea or the rest certainly seemed to do him a great deal of good. He ate with more appetite,

and for several days he had hardly any fits of pain. Then, too, he slept well, and altogether seemed as though he were shaking off his strange ailment. The depression which, in spite of his legal victory, had been settling down upon him like a black fog, was suddenly lifted, and he became once more the energetic, self-confident, boastful, successful business man.

And then the blow fell. Lizzie never forgot that day. It was easy to fix, for it was the day before Good Friday. All through dinner Mr. Porlick was reminiscent, telling of his small beginnings, and contrasting with them his successive triumphs.

"Do you remember that shop I showed you yesterday?" he asked, for the third or fourth time. "It's been altered and almost rebuilt since the time I'm speaking of; but there it was that your father made his first start. That little bedroom—you know the window I showed you—many a time I've looked out from it at half-past six in the morning, and wondered whether I should ever make headway. And now—well, you know something about my bank-book, don't you? Sometimes, I declare, it seems like a fairy tale; but it's not. It's just good, honest hard work and brains that have done it, and, of course, the blessing of God."

So he talked through dinner, and afterwards lay back in an armchair with his handkerchief over his face, to keep off the flies, while he tried to doze. Lizzie went out for a little shopping, in which her heart delighted, especially if—as on this occasion—it was gift-buying. When she returned the landlady met her in the hall with a scared expression on her face.

"Your father's very bad, miss," she exclaimed,

holding up her hands with a gesture intended to be at once arresting and consoling. "Don't be frightened, but it's some sort of a seizure. If you hadn't come in this minute I was just going to send one of the maids for Dr. Cutler. He's——"

But, without waiting for any information about Mrs. Sylvester's medical man, Lizzie pushed past and opened the door.

Mr. Porlick was lying on the sofa, some distance from the armchair in which she had left him. Usually neat and precise in dress, he now presented a strange appearance. His hair dishevelled, his collar and tie half round his neck, his face clammy and livid, he was moaning, and every now and again breaking out into short, fierce little screams of pain.

For a moment Lizzie stopped, horror-struck. She had never seen him in real pain before.

"Oh, father dear, what is the matter?" she cried.

"Go away!" he groaned. "I'm dying. Oh, it's like fire! Go away, or do something. Oh, I can't bear this much longer!"

Lizzie slipped out into the passage, nearly upsetting Mrs. Sylvester, who looked exceedingly flurried.

"Please send for your doctor at once!" she said.

Among the presents she had been buying was a bottle of eau de Cologne. She moistened her handkerchief and bathed his forehead. He lay still for a minute or two, then began groaning again, and jerked his head away from her like a fractious child.

"Take—filthy stuff away," he cried; "—know I hate it."

In a few minutes the doctor arrived, and succeeded in getting Mr. Porlick to bed. When he returned to the dining-room his face was grave. After asking a number of questions, he wrote a prescription.

"Give him this, as soon as it comes from the chemist," he said; "I don't fancy he'll have another attack to-night. I'll come round before noon to-morrow. I've told him not to get up till I've seen him. I'll examine him carefully in bed."

"Have you no idea what it is until you examine him?" she asked.

"It's only guess-work at present," he answered; "he tells me he suffers from indigestion."

"Yes," she replied; "for the last six months or more he's been a martyr to it."

To Lizzie's astonishment, her father made no demur to staying in bed, though he seemed quite free from pain the next morning; but she thought she had never seen him so quiet and so sad.

The examination took up the best part of an hour.

"What do you think of him, doctor?" she asked anxiously, when it was over.

"I am afraid I can't give a very cheerful report," he answered; "there is certainly some deep-seated mischief, but what the exact cause is, must at present be more or less conjecture."

"But surely there must be some treatment."

He hesitated, as she was quick to notice.

"Please tell me the exact truth," she begged him.

"Well," he said, "the treatment I should suggest is only palliative; it won't and can't go to the root of the matter. I should advise him to stop down

here for another week. He must take things very quietly indeed—sit in the gardens or take a gentle walk along the front; or, better still, go for a drive as often as he feels inclined. He must never in the slightest degree tire himself. Let him live as simply as possible—I will jot down a dietary for him—and take the medicines I will prescribe. Then, if all goes well, I think he should go back to London and see a specialist—a surgeon. I have no doubt his regular medical attendant will suggest a name."

"Father never goes to a doctor; but I will try again and get him to call in Dr. Burnyat, who attended my mother in her last illness. Can you suggest a specialist, in case he won't have our own doctor?"

"You couldn't do better than Horace Welsh," he said; "I'll write down his address."

Lizzie fully expected that as soon as her father found himself free from pain he would refuse to see the doctor; but, to her surprise, there was no difficulty of the kind. He did not even inquire how many visits he was entitled to for a guinea. He followed the doctor's orders with perfect fidelity; but he never asked him a single question as to his illness. Nor did he question Lizzie as to what the doctor had said to her; it was she who had to take the initiative and tell him what Dr. Cutler had said as to seeing a specialist. All he said was "Very well, let us arrange to go back next Tuesday."

To Lizzie those last days at Bournemouth seemed like a long nightmare. A sudden change had transformed her father to a stranger, who sat at meals silent and apart, just answering when spoken to, but with a paralyzing lack of interest, neither

boastful nor irritable, but intensely self-absorbed. On the cliff or in the gardens he sat by the hour together, wrapped in his own thoughts, and perfectly oblivious of his daughter's tender solicitude.

The fact was, the recurrence of his pain in this terribly aggravated form had been the severest blow Fate or Providence had ever dealt him.

For he sincerely believed himself to be a religious man, and religion naturally presented itself to him as a contract between Providence and Josiah Porlick. Hitherto Providence had, on the whole, behaved quite fairly, and even handsomely, and Josiah had, a thousand times over, in his life and conversation, given full acknowledgment for favours received. Now there was one episode in his career of which he felt genuinely ashamed—his slight and temporary lapse into intemperance. It seemed, as he looked back upon it, so inexplicable for a man of his blameless life and iron will, that he had finally adopted the theory of some obscure physical cause. Still, there it was, and it ought and had to be paid for. Very good. He *had* paid, by those dreadful fits of agony that for months had made his life a misery. He had broken the evil habit from which so few men have power to free themselves, and gradually he had felt—so he told himself—a distinct improvement in his health. That, of course, was Providence writing his receipt. And when the days at Bournemouth went by without a touch of the once dreaded pain, his heart expanded in the sunshine of prosperity, and, as he expressed it, he was "himself again."

Hence the crushing force of his sudden relapse. Dogged and proud as he was in his dealings with other men, he was not really brave. A dull

imagination cloaks many a coward's shame, and so it was with him. As long as his commercial theory held the field, religion was not only one of the most reasonable, but one of the most cheering facts of life to an upright and successful business man. But now that his temple of cards had come clattering about his ears he was stricken with a paralyzing fear. If it were not Contract seated on the throne of the universe, to whom should he say his prayers, and how?

The more he pondered, the deeper his dismay. There had been something indescribable in this last attack—something that had chilled him with the dreadful presage of death. He had no heart any longer to talk of indigestion. His mind returned again and again to one hateful question—*What did your sister Jane die of?*

Gradually, however, he began to rally from this intense and overpowering depression. As, beneath the doctor's palliatives, the physical effects of the fierce paroxysm slowly passed away, his boding mind sought eagerly for some way of escape, some door of hope. As he lay awake on Sunday night an idea that had been vaguely in his mind all through the day seemed to assume a definite form. Weak as he was, he had insisted on attending three services. He had been culpably remiss of late, he told himself, in these sacred observances, and then he turned to a wider and a stricter self-examination. Closely and laboriously he scrutinized his life and conduct, and with every fault and neglect he discovered his hopes began to rise, for here was an explanation of the inexplicable, and that made clear, atonement and satisfaction could easily follow. Once more he raised the question of the Newdigate

purchase; but here the old verdict remained undisturbed. He had only seized an opportunity and made a good bargain—the essence of wise business policy. It was different when he came to later times and accused himself of having, after he left the Orphanage Committee, kept back part of the money set free by the withdrawal of his subscription. This was a sin which Providence could not be expected to pass over. He wondered now that he had ever dared to commit so flagrant an offence. "No wonder," he mused, and shuddered as he remembered the scorpions with which he had been lashed. And then there rose and rapidly matured in his mind a plan for appeasing and propitiating Providence, which he determined to carry into execution as soon as he returned to London.

VII

"LIZZIE," said Mr. Porlick, abruptly, "should you like to have a hospital ward named after you—*The Elizabeth Porlick Ward*—it doesn't sound bad, eh?"

They were back at Goldcroft, and Lizzie had come into the study for one of those evening gossips which had been interrupted for a time, but were now resumed.

"Oh yes, father dear," she exclaimed; "at least, I don't mind about the name. If you pay the money it ought to bear your name. That's business, isn't it? But it would be a lovely thing to do. What hospital is it to be at?"

Mr. Porlick smiled pleasantly at her little joke about the name. He enjoyed it all the more because it seemed to him a perfectly reasonable suggestion. His eyes hid themselves behind their calculating veil. Then, after a long pause, he said—

"Why not *two* wards—father and daughter—men and women, or girls and boys?"

She clapped her hands.

"Better and better! It *is* a beautiful thought of yours, father. What a fine thing it is to be rich, isn't it? What a lot of good one can do!"

"Yes," cried Mr. Porlick, eagerly, "quite right, my dear; the rich man is a kind of Providence to

the rest of the world. Yes," he repeated, as though struck by his own phrase, "a kind of Providence. Humble and subordinate, of course, but still a Providence."

At this point he once more became absorbed in thought, and Lizzie quietly took out her knitting.

In a few minutes he began again.

"Have you any idea what it costs to endow a ward?"

She shook her head.

"Well, if it's set about and done in a business-like way by any one who knows what he's about, I believe it could be managed for twenty thousand pounds."

"That's a lot of money!" exclaimed Lizzie, admiring his generosity.

He misunderstood her.

"Ah, and twice twenty's forty. Forty thousand pounds. It'll make a big hole in your fortune, eh?"

She laughed, and at the sound of her voice even Mr. Porlick recognized his mistake.

"You forget," she said, with much dignity, but with dancing eyes, "I'm a capitalist in my own right."

"Ah, well," he said, "there'll be something left for you, after all, when I'm gone."

"Don't talk like that," she cried; "you do feel much better, don't you? When are you going to see that specialist? I've got his address."

"Then put it in the fire," exclaimed Mr. Porlick, with a sudden gust of irritability; "the butchers haven't got hold of me yet, and, please God, they never shall. I wish you wouldn't worry me by talking about them. You know my feelings perfectly well."

His face flushed angrily, and his voice strained to a high hysterical note. Lizzie gave a little involuntary sigh, and said no more.

Mr. Porlick unlocked a drawer and took out some papers, over which he pored in silence for five or ten minutes. At last he looked up.

"Now, if you can keep your mind on one subject for five minutes together, come here, and I'll show you my ideas about these wards."

That night Mr. Porlick had a sharp attack of pain, the first since his Bournemouth seizure; and, though it lasted only a few minutes, it left its marks on his morning face, and Lizzie's heart sank as she kissed him.

As soon as breakfast was over—and his was only a cup of tea and half a small piece of toast—he went upstairs and wrote a letter, not very lengthy, but sufficiently pompous, to the Secretary of St. Godfrey's Hospital, laying down the terms on which he was willing to build and endow two wards, containing fifteen beds each, to be called respectively *The Josiah Porlick Ward* and *The Elizabeth Porlick Ward.* This done, he went forth to business, three-quarters of an hour late, but comforted in heart. A voice within seemed to assure him that his offering was accepted.

VIII

MR. PORLICK'S offer was received with effusive gratitude by the hospital authorities; but they were hardly prepared for the restless energy with which he spurred them on to the execution of the work. They could not guess that to him the matter presented itself as one of life and death. For now the attacks of pain had returned with the old persistency, and more than the old severity, and he kept assuring himself that this was only what he ought to expect as long as his act of reparation was incomplete.

Meanwhile, he was not without consolation. Never in all his long and fortunate career had his material prosperity been so obtrusive. Into every fresh enterprise that he essayed success walked with him hand in hand. The new bolt promised to be an even better property than the old, and he was already laying down fresh plant for its manufacture. His Manchester branch had done so well that he had started companion branches in Liverpool and Bristol, and both were flourishing. Then he had been selling and buying in the American railway market with unfailing good fortune. But perhaps he derived the greatest satisfaction from Beckton's bankruptcy. It was not pure malignity; it was the feeling that Providence was fighting for him against



his enemies; it was a proof—as he put it to himself—that he would not be deserted in his hour of need.

That hour, he began to recognize, was drawing very near. Again and again he enjoyed respites from his torture, during which he offered fervent thanks and elaborated fresh plans for filling his barns; but with each recurrence of the attacks his strength grew sensibly less. Travelling to town tried him sadly, and more than once he spent the night at Baker Street, where he had had a small bedroom furnished for his occasional use.

Under these circumstances, with the fear of death constantly before his eyes, he cast about in every direction for any means of averting the peril in which he stood. And as some swimmer in dire peril clutches at a filthy slimy plank from which, in safety, he would shrink with loathing, so did Mr. Porlick begin to entertain an idea which a few months before he would have rejected with scorn and anger.

Could his conduct, he asked himself, have been just a trifle less than perfectly correct in that little matter of the first Newdigate bolt? If so, how should he now balance the account? But the thought revolted him. He even began to feel a dull resentment against the voiceless Omnipotence that was driving him to the acknowledgment of a fault which his reason had proved over and over again to have no real existence. Then came a grievous half-hour, when the awful Shadow seemed to fill his room, and all his pride melted like wax in the heat of the furnace.

"Lizzie," he said, the next night, "do you know where that Julia is living now?"

Lizzie was astonished and delighted, for since Julia left the house he had hardly mentioned her name.

"Yes," she answered, "I have her address."

"With those Becktons, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"How is she getting on?"

"Not very well. The lady for whom she has been working goes to America in a week or two, and Ju will be out of work."

"She's got the Orphanage, hasn't she?"

"Yes, but that's not enough for her to live decently on."

Mr. Porlick grunted.

"She should have thought of that before——" he began, then checked himself, and, after a pause, commenced again, stiffly and awkwardly, "She behaved abominably; but she's Jane's child, and I can't see her starve. Give her this from me."

And he tossed a cheque across the table.

Lizzie glanced at the figures and saw "£1000." She sprang up with a loud exclamation, and running to him, threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"Dear father!" she cried. "Oh, I am so glad! It *is* good of you! And may I ask Ju to come and thank you herself? *Do* send her some little message," she coaxed.

"Tell her this," said Mr. Porlick, frowning as of old. "I send her the money for her mother's sake, not for her own. She's a violent, pig-headed, insolent, ungrateful girl, and she shall never cross my threshold again till she has humbly apologized for her misconduct."



Lizzie sighed as she put the cheque in her purse, for she guessed what Ju would say.

The next evening, when Mr. Porlick came down to dinner, he found a letter in the firm, square writing that always recalled his sister. He opened it hastily, and the cheque fell out. He could hardly believe his eyes.

"Surely I signed it!" he exclaimed.

Then he saw there was a sheet of paper. He pulled it out and unfolded it. Across the first page was written—

"Because I remember that you are mother's brother, I will not put into words my reason for refusing your money. I would far rather starve than take it.

"JULIA."

His first feeling as he pocketed the note was satisfaction at recovering his money. But this was followed by a sudden dismay as the thought struck him that his offering was rejected. Then he smiled.

"I can leave it her in my will," he said, "and perhaps I may outlive her, after all."

IX

It was at this point of his career that Mr. Porlick became a public character. For many years he had, of course, been a well-known figure in the business world and in the church and chapel circle which, from time to time, he had entered. Now he suddenly found his name figuring in the local papers, and even forming the subject of paragraphs in the daily press. In the former it was, "*Our public-spirited neighbour*," and "*Splendid generosity of an Ealing resident*," and "*Princely benefactions by an Ealing merchant.*" There was also in one of these papers an article, which was sent to him marked in blue pencil, contrasting his action in giving the money during his lifetime with that of so many wealthy men, who clutch their money-bags to the last gasp, and are liberal only when it can cost them nothing. The pleasure which these notices afforded Mr. Porlick was very great. He had expected a certain amount of public recognition, but the reality far exceeded his expectations. He cut out the references, pasted them in a book, and read them over at least once every day.

Another, and a less pleasing consequence of his munificence, was an avalanche of appeals, ranging from the high-toned circulars of gilt-edged charities to the ungrammatical effusions of obscure but

pertinacious impostors. Everything that bore the marks of poverty Mr. Porlick swept unread into the paper-basket. The others he read with care.

Meanwhile his strength continued to fail. He struggled vigorously and tenaciously, like some beleaguered garrison, that each morning searches the bare horizon for the long-expected relief. But every week his once portly figure shrank, and his face grew pinched and hollow, his eye dim, and his voice more dull and lifeless. But his will remained strong enough to drive the wearied body through the old routine, though he had been obliged to give up his early train for one three-quarters of an hour later.

Lizzie, terribly distressed and alarmed, braved his displeasure, and urged and begged him once more to consult the specialist, till he grew so angry and excited that, with tears in her eyes, she gave up the attempt.

But though his abject fear—for this was the real reason—kept him from the consulting-room, his mind was still eagerly, fiercely in quest of some way of escape.

One evening, coming home in the train, he heard a party of three discussing clairvoyance and kindred wonders.

"I don't profess to explain it," said one; "all I know is, Jack went to her a fortnight before he sailed, and she told him he would marry that year, lose his wife the next, have a desperate illness the third, and just pull through after all."

"And did it turn out so?" asked one of the others.

"To a hair. He became engaged on the journey out, and married in Calcutta. Six months after, his

wife died of fever. Twelve months after her death he had a sunstroke, and then brain fever, and now he's just beginning to crawl about again."

"What made him go to her?"

"Oh, he saw her advertisement in the *Oracle*. I believe there are a lot of them there still."

Two days after he overheard this conversation Mr. Porlick told Lizzie that he would probably be kept late, and would have some supper whenever he came in. He stopped at Baker Street till eight, when every one but the caretakers had gone; then, after carefully consulting a page in the *Oracle*, which he immediately tore up and put in the fire, he took an omnibus to Regent Circus. There he got out and walked down Portland Place as far as Weymouth Street. Turning down here, and then again to left and right, he found himself, tired and panting, in a narrow street with small shops, and here and there groups of private houses. At one of these, a plate on the door, he stopped and rang the middle bell. After a short wait the door was opened by an untidy elderly woman, who answered his inquiry for "Madame Clairine" by asking him to step upstairs. She took him into a small room overcrowded with chintz-covered lounge chairs, a piano, a round table, and a large brass floor-lamp.

"Madame will be here in a minute, if you'll take a seat," she said, and vanished.

Mr. Porlick was so exhausted by his walk that he was glad to sink down on one of the chairs, ridiculously low as they were.

The minute was a very long one, but at last he heard a rustling behind him, some hangings were pulled aside, and "Madame" appeared.

She was a tall, dark woman, of opulent figure, but rather forbidding face. She wore a long loose wrapper, deep crimson in colour; her wrists and fingers were heavy with bracelets, bangles, and rings. Her piercing eyes met his with one swift note of interrogation; then, in a rather pleasant voice, she asked—

"Do you want to consult the crystal?"

Mr. Porlick, who had risen on her entrance, sank down again with a little grunt, and answered with another question.

"What's your fee?"

"One guinea, or a guinea and a half for a written answer to any three questions concerning the future."

Mr. Porlick was beginning to feel very foolish and very uncomfortable. The little room was insufferably hot, and smelt vilely of some powerful scent. He had noticed on the table a dirty pack of cards and some theatrical papers, and he was not favourably impressed by the manners or appearance of his magician. He resolved, however, to go through with the adventure.

"I will give you a sovereign," he said, "if you answer a couple of preliminary questions correctly."

She shook her head.

"My fee is a guinea, paid before I consult the crystal;" and, opening a drawer, she produced a large, transparent ball.

Mr. Porlick's commercial instincts told him loudly that he was being imposed upon, but he was weak and tired, and madame's dark eyes seemed to hold him under a kind of spell.

"Very well," he said, and drew out the guinea.

She tossed the coins into the drawer, turned the lamp a little lower, sat down on one of the chairs, and began to gaze intently on the crystal. Presently her arms dropped at full length by her side, and she lay back, her eyes still fixed on the ball upon her lap.

"Ask," she whispered in the voice of one talking in her sleep, "what you wish to know."

"What will happen to me in the next twelve months?" asked Mr. Porlick, anxious to get his full pennyworth.

For nearly five minutes there was no answer, and the silence began to affect him strangely. Just as he was wondering whether he should faint or put on his hat and demand his money back, she began to speak in the same strange whisper.

"I see a long street with large houses, trees and gardens. I do not know where it is, but it looks like one of the suburbs."

Mr. Porlick started. There was a row of trees in front of Goldcroft.

"There is a handsomely furnished room—it is a bedroom. A man is in bed. Ah yes, I can see him—it is the man in this room now; he is ill."

Mr. Porlick gave a little gasp.

"Very ill," she went on; "his face is all yellow and pinched."

"Will he recover?" he asked, and his voice, too, sounded strange.

Again there was a long pause before she spoke.

"There is a veil over the room, and I cannot see. It is not a black veil but a sort of grey mist."

"What does that mean?"

"It is not yet decided; it depends upon the man himself. Ah!"

And with a violent start she seemed to come out of her trance.

"What was I saying?" she asked him.

"Very little for a guinea," he answered, getting up with a good deal of difficulty. "Can't you look again?"

"No, I can see nothing more till the sun has risen again. But I can consult the cards if you like."

"Very well. Ask them what the man should do if he wishes to recover."

She held out her hand.

"The fee for the cards is a guinea."

"No," said Mr. Porlick, firmly, buttoning his coat; "it's an imposition. I've a great mind to have the other guinea back."

She sprang up, her eyes blazing, and pointed to the door.

"Go!" she said; and Mr. Porlick, remembering that publicity might be inconvenient, went.

X

THOUGH Julia had found spirit enough to send back her uncle's cheque, she was, nevertheless, sore bestead. Her employer had gone back to America, and she had only her slender Orphanage salary to rely upon. Mr. Clayton had started on a long tour through Canada and Australia, and was to be away at least six months. Now that he was far away from her, she realized how strong was her affection for him. There were hours of depression, when her heart seemed to cry out pitifully for the happiness of human love and the sunshine of material prosperity. At such times she schooled herself to gratitude that the great temptation to be false to her ideals of duty was removed from her. It seemed as though one more attack must have beaten down her walls and turrets.

It was, perhaps, fortunate for her that her friends the Becktons were also in straits. He had found employment as manager in a small and struggling firm where his salary was partially derived from commission. Never very robust, his troubles seemed for the time to have left him a wreck, without spirit or energy. But the storm that had dealt so hardly with him appeared only to brace and invigorate his wife. The gentle, timid little governess developed into a heroine who, with

brave words and a smiling face, set about the task of repairing their shattered fortunes. At first her efforts appeared hopelessly futile. Her advertisements for boarders were unsuccessful, and her attempts to get teaching engagements in schools met with a similar fate. Then it was that Julia suggested trying to open a small day-school themselves.

They began with small expectations and very modest equipment. From the first, however, the undertaking throve, and before the end of their first term they were forced to plan alterations and additions. Their success was really natural enough. Mrs. Beckton was a well-trained teacher and a brilliant musician, while Julia "had a way with her," as the girls said, which made her extremely popular with them, and she was, in addition to her intellectual gifts, an admirable woman of business. Lizzie, of course, was kept informed, from week to week, of their progress, and was made very happy by the acceptance of a small loan for books and stationery, a loan which was speedily repaid.

Gradually, as their prospects brightened, Beckton began to regain his spirits. The recovery was accelerated by a most opportune legacy of three thousand pounds from his rich aunt, an accession of wealth as welcome as it was unexpected, which enabled him not only to pay every penny of his debt to Mr. Porlick, but to purchase a share in the business he was managing.

Len wrote occasionally. His letters followed the usual course. At first they were sanguine, enthusiastic; there was no country fit to compare for a moment with the "unexhausted West." Every one was kind and hospitable; he was getting

on like a house on fire. Next time he wrote, he would send back the trifle he owed her and the Becktons. Then, after a long interval, came a second series, cynical, querulous, complaining of ill-health, hinting at professional jealousy, and winding up with an inquiry whether she could let him have a few dollars if he got hard up. This tentative kind of borrowing seemed to Julia a sign of grace, and she sent him two pounds from her sadly shrunken savings, but told him how narrow her own means were just then. Finally came a short letter, thanking her warmly, and saying he was off to California, where there was always a chance of health as well as dollars. Then, silence.

One evening in December, Frank Beckton, enjoying what he called his "smoking reader" after dinner, gave a sudden exclamation that made his wife and Julia look up in astonishment.

"Listen to this!" he cried, his finger on a paragraph in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

"'*We understand that Mr. Josiah Porlick who recently presented two completely-equipped Wards to St. Godfrey's Hospital at a cost of not less than forty thousand pounds, has now announced his intention of building and endowing a Convalescent Home in Sussex for the use of patients from any of the London Hospitals. For this purpose he has placed the sum of a hundred thousand pounds in the hands of the Presidents of four of the principal hospitals as trustees. We believe the Prince of Wales has consented to be present at the dedicatory service with which, in accordance with Mr. Porlick's desire, the Wards at St. Godfrey's are soon to be opened.*'

"Think of that!" exclaimed Beckton; "one

hundred and forty thousand pounds! Why, I'd no idea he was worth anything like that. I wonder what Master Herbert says to his patrimony being sold and given to the poor?"

"It's only another of Uncle Josiah's investments," said Julia, her face set in its hardest expression; "I wonder if it will be as successful as the rest?"

"Perhaps he's beginning to be afraid," suggested Mrs. Beckton.

"Of course he is," said Julia; "he's a coward to the bone. Think what mother was, and he her brother!"

"He'll be 'Sir Josiah' if he lives long enough," declared Beckton.

XI

Beckton's prophecy was speedily fulfilled. The list of honours on New Year's day contained among the knights the name of Josiah Porlick, Esq. It was an honour of which, six months before, he had not dreamed. But now that it had sought him out, it found him only the shadow of what he had been. In October he had been obliged to stop at home for a week, and, though he recovered sufficiently to get down to business again, yet his attendance was irregular, and about the first week in December it had ceased altogether. Even then, weak as he was, he told himself, as well as Lizzie, that his reason for staying in was to draw up a scheme and rules for his hospital benefactions.

This task, however, was now beyond him, though he would not admit it. He would sit at his desk literally for hours, his pen in his wasted fingers and the papers before him, but all the time his thoughts were busy with his own immediate future and that longer, darker future that lay beyond. For with failing strength, the confidence in his recuperative power, which of old had kept the thought of death at bay, grew very weak, and his heart became as water. He recognized the awful fact that in the midst of plenty he was being slowly starved. Always hungry, sometimes

ravenous, the constant sickness and the frequent agony made him dread the very sight of food. At last Lizzie could bear the sight of his suffering no more without making one final effort. She wrote to Mr. Welsh herself, and fixed a time for him to come to Goldcroft. When he arrived—it was in the afternoon—she went to her father, whom she found just recovering from one of his fits of pain.

"Father dear," she said, "I hope you won't be vexed, but I can't bear to see you suffer so, and I have sent for Mr. Welsh, the surgeon Dr. Cutler recommended when you were so bad at Bournemouth. He is in the drawing-room now. You will see him, won't you?"

She had only faint hope of his acquiescence, but though a frown did begin to form on his brow it died away, and he said, raising himself in his chair, where he had been lying back, huddled up—

"Very well, child, bring him in."

In about half an hour the surgeon came down and followed Lizzie into the drawing-room.

"How do you find him?" she asked, her eyes trying to read his face.

He looked at her with grave kindness, for her anxiety was unmistakable.

"I am afraid there is nothing to be done except to save him pain as much as possible."

"Do you mean——" she began, steadying herself with one hand against the table.

He gave a slight but significant nod.

"Yes," he said. "He has been asking me about an operation; but——"

"He asked about an operation?" she interrupted, wondering whether she could have heard aright.

"Yes," he answered, astonished at her astonishment; "it was very natural, of course. I thought it was better to temporize, at any rate till I had seen you, so I said we must try to get up his strength a little. It's a terribly advanced case. He must have had a fine constitution. I have told him he must have a medical man in regular attendance. You have a family doctor, no doubt?"

"Yes," she answered—"Dr. Burnyat; but I am afraid he wouldn't see him."

"Well, have some one else then. A doctor he *must* have, in regular attendance. A collapse may occur at any moment. You ought to have a nurse in the house too, so as to be prepared. I tell you what. There's a very able man—he was one of my students—Granton his name is, somewhere in this neighbourhood. I'll telegraph you his address, and you send for him to-night. He'll communicate with me if he thinks necessary."

As soon as the surgeon had gone, Lizzie hurried upstairs. Her father had turned his chair from the table towards the fire, and, as he leaned forward, his hands spread on the arms of the chair, he seemed to have grown old in a few minutes. He looked up at her with a wistful expression in his eyes that went to her heart.

"What does he say?"

He evidently tried hard to speak in an indifferent tone, but beneath the husky voice there rang the cry of a strong man clutching at life.

"He says you must have a doctor in regular attendance. He is going to send the address of one—a very clever man, he says, who was one of his own students."

The wistfulness died out of his eyes, and a more familiar expression rose in its place. Lizzie's heart smote her, for she could interpret the gleam of hope and new resolve, and she felt that she was deceiving him.

"Well, well, child," he said, and his voice was stronger, "to please you. Did he say how many visits for a guinea?"

But even in this extremity Mr. Porlick derived intense pleasure from his new honours. The album in which Lizzie pasted the press-cuttings—this was now one of her tasks—was always close at hand, and the pages were rapidly filling. A leading article in the *Times*, in which his munificence was held up as an example to others, acted upon him like a powerful tonic. For half an hour he talked in quite the old fashion, recalling his small beginnings and gradual progress, culminating in this crowning glory of being "ennobled"—so he put it—"by his sovereign, God bless her." He insisted on having cards printed with his new title, and talked of sending to the Herald's College for a simple crest.

He still retained, almost unimpaired, his power of dealing with figures, and his judgment on matters of business. Three times in the week he saw the chief manager from Baker Street, though the interview had to be divided into sections, with intervals of half an hour or more.

It was during one of his final rallies that Herbert, thoroughly alarmed by his father's portentous liberality, visited Goldcroft to remonstrate.

"He must be right off his head," he declared to Lizzie before he went upstairs. "We shall be

left beggars. There ought to be some power to interfere."

What happened at the interview will probably never be fully known. But towards the end Mr. Porlick's voice rang out loud and passionate, and Lizzie, hurrying up, met Herbert, pale and sulky, coming out of the room.

"You'd better make up your mind to go out governessing," he said, as he hurried off to catch his train; "he must have been borrowing. We shall be lucky if the balance isn't on the wrong side."

Two days after, Mr. Porlick's lawyer for the time being, came with a clerk, and was closeted with Mr. Porlick for over an hour.

XII

In the fading light of a bitter January day, Sir Josiah Porlick sat in his armchair facing a modest fire, for he was still intolerant of extravagance. Death was written in every line of his sunken face; but his eyes were keen, and his voice, though weak, sounded fairly cheerful. In his hand was a long slip of paper like a proof, which he was studying closely. At his feet on a low stool, with a book on her lap, sat Lizzie. Upon the mantelpiece were two or three bottles and a graduated glass.

"Isn't it time for the brown medicine?" he asked suddenly, laying down the paper.

Lizzie gave a start.

"It's five minutes to four," she said; "but I can mix it now."

"No, no, keep to the proper time. Granton's a first-rate chap. I believe he really understands the case. He said my pulse was stronger, and I feel distinctly better."

"That's right," she answered, trying hard to speak brightly, as the doctor had bidden her.

"Did he say anything, this morning, about me?" asked the invalid, looking hard at the fire and not at his daughter.

"He said you might try a little Brain-bran for supper."

"Sensible fellow, Granton," said Sir Josiah, rubbing his hands; "that stuff always did suit me. I wish I'd stuck to it all through."

There was a pause. Lizzie rose up and poured out the medicine. As she stirred it the clock struck.

He smiled, as with trembling hand he took the glass.

"Ah, it doesn't taste so bad when I get it on the stroke of time."

"Shall I read to you a little?" she asked.

"Yes, do, my dear," he said, with the air of one who confers a privilege.

"What shall it be?" she asked.

Since he had been obliged to give up taking prayers, Sir Josiah had made it a solemn rule to read, or have read to him daily, two portions of Scripture. One was overdue, so that Lizzie quite expected the answer.

"The Bible."

"Any particular place?"

"The first Psalm."

He listened, with eyes closed and his head a little bowed, and nodded as she read the last verse—

"*For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.*"

"True, true," he murmured.

"Shall I go on?" she asked.

He frowned.

"No—there's enough there to think over for hours."

As he spoke, he leaned back and lay for a

minute or two as though asleep. Then he roused himself, and said, pointing to the slip on the table—

"Now read me that."

Two or three weeks before, an interviewer had called from *The Circle* and had gathered material for the article now in proof—"*Sir Josiah Porlick at Home.*"

Lizzie got up to light the gas, but her father lifted his hand to stop her.

"No, no," he said, "your young eyes can see well enough with that bright firelight."

As she read the story of his rise—that familiar tale which he had himself rehearsed a hundred times, his eyes brightened again, and he seemed to pull himself together while he watched now the precious article, and now his daughter's face. This was, perhaps, the tit-bit of his life, to hear that wonderful story told with just enough variety to add a fresh charm to it; to listen to the minute description of his regular habits, simple tastes, homely surroundings, and princely liberality set forth by a skilful writer for the wide world to read and to admire. As she finished the last lines—

"*Unrivalled business capacity naturally crowned with brilliant success, unblemished reputation, spotless integrity, a singular freedom from ostentation, and a truly royal generosity—such are the characteristics of the best type of British commercial aristocracy of which no worthier member can be found than the large-hearted, open-handed donor of the Porlick Wards and the Porlick Convalescent Home*"

—he leaned back with a seraphic smile that recalled the days of his health and strength.

"That will do, child," he said, patting her arm

with an affectionate little gesture. "You read very nicely indeed. Now leave me for half an hour. I feel as though I could enjoy a nap. You may light the gas—one burner—this one over my head, but turn it quite low. And put that slip here on this table, will you? That's right. Tell them I'll have a glass of milk at five o'clock, when they bring your tea."

And, closing his eyes, he appeared to compose himself to sleep.

At five o'clock exactly Lizzie opened the door and went into the room, followed by the girl with the tray. The gas which she had left low was now full on; but as her father sat underneath it, with his head a little tilted forward, his face was in shadow. She thought he was still asleep, and motioned to the girl to put the tray on the table without disturbing him. Just as she was hesitating whether or not to wake him, she heard the sound of wheels outside, followed by a ring she recognized.

"The doctor!" she exclaimed. "Quick, Mary; he will have tea with the master. I will have mine downstairs."

The moment Dr. Granton entered the room his practised eye detected something strange in his patient's attitude. He walked across quickly, and bent over the chair. Then he started back with a hasty, half-smothered ejaculation.

The face of the seated figure was absolutely white, the eyes set in a fixed stare that might express fear, astonishment, or anger. The hands grasped a long slip of printed paper, across which ran a broad, dark, crimson stain. When he looked



more closely, he saw that the same broad stream ran from the pale, wide-opened lips across the white shirt-front, and down all the clothes, till it lost itself in the black rug in front of the chair.

This was the end of the greatness.

XIII

THE latest will, executed immediately after the quarrel with Herbert, was a very simple document. After revoking a previous gift of his Manchester business to his son Herbert, the testator left him in lieu thereof, if, and when all sums due to his estate had been fully paid and discharged by the said Herbert Porlick, the sum of ten thousand pounds. A thousand pounds were left to William Gardiner, "formerly manager of my Manchester branch;" ten thousand pounds to Ellen Cartwright, a thousand pounds to "my niece Julia Hastings, and all the rest and residue of my real and personal estate whatsoever and wheresoever, I give devise and bequeath to my dear daughter Elizabeth absolutely."

The will itself was a great surprise to Lizzie, but the trustees' report was a greater. Remembering Herbert's words of warning, she had assumed that her father must have given away the bulk of his large property. To her intense astonishment she found herself, a day or two after attaining her majority, the absolute owner of an estate worth at least half a million. Herbert, of course, was furious, and took counsel with his solicitor as to the chances of upsetting the will. Meeting with

no encouragement, he then adopted the wiser course of appealing to his sister's generosity.

True to her theory that her father's apparent harshness was always due to ignorance or misapprehension of facts, Lizzie proceeded to make such dispositions of the property as he would have made had he known the true state of affairs. On this hypothesis she presented Herbert with the Manchester business as well as the ten thousand pounds. She insisted on Julia telling her the story of the Newdigate bolt from the Hastings' point of view; and then, after a long struggle, succeeded in getting her to take Sir Josiah's interest in the Company for herself and Len, with an understanding that Beckton should, as soon as possible, be appointed manager. Ellen's ten thousand she made up to fifty, and she distributed gifts in her father's name to all his employees in proportion to their respective positions and length of service. The Orphanage at Hampstead she rebuilt and endowed, while she determined to keep a watchful eye on the Wards and Convalescent Home.

At her pressing invitation, Julia once more made her home at Goldcroft, at any rate till Len should return, which, however, he seems to be in no hurry to do. Now well supplied with money, he tells his sister he intends at last to go through a severe academic course in music, before he returns to settle down with her.

As for Hugh, his was a case of mysterious disappearance. From the time he left Goldcroft no trace of him has ever been discovered, but Lizzie clings to the hope that he may yet appear to claim his share.

Mr. Clayton returned to England after an

absence of more than twelve months, with a colonial wife, middle-aged, but well-preserved, a sincere Christian, tactful and well-informed, with a comfortable little income of her own. He has settled in the North, where he is said to be doing a splendid work, and making a great name for himself.

Julia, though she has "no ear," often sings hymns with Lizzie on Sunday evenings, and has recently bought a complete set of Cardinal Newman's works.

It is a strange world, my masters, but high up, the skies are blue.



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